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A SPORTSMAN AT LARGE

Harding Cox

A Sportsman at Large

By Major Harding Cox :: Author of
"Chasing and Racing" :: :: :: :: ::

With Frontispiece and Dedication

LONDON: HUTCHINSON & CO.
:: :: PATERNOSTER ROW, E.C. :: ::

Dedicated to
my distinguished friend and relative,
AIR MARSHAL SIR HUGH TRENCHARD, BART., K.C.B.
whose love of the gun
and his skilful use thereof
marks him as
a true and keen sportsman

C67

FOREWORD

My dear Harding Cox,

"A Sportsman at Large" covers a wide field of sporting activities, shooting, fishing, coursing and aquatic, and as you are privileged to write on these subjects from first-hand knowledge and experience, I feel sure that your book will appeal successfully to the large body of readers who appreciate what is written under such conditions by a competent hand. Your sporting experiences have been varied and successful, and I can confidently wish you all good fortune in your latest contribution to our sporting literature.

Yours truly,

Desborough.

Taplow Court, Bucks.

M312352

PREFACE.

So kind and indulgent were the Press and the public in their reception of "Chasing and Racing," wherein I set down my experiences in the hunting-field and on the turf, that I have been emboldened to submit yet another venture to their good graces. "A Sportsman at Large" may well be described as a companion volume to the one mentioned. Those who have had the hardihood to wade through "Chasing and Racing," or even to dip into its discursive pages, will, no doubt, wonder how it came about that I was able to indulge in shooting, fishing, coursing, etc., when I was so busy with hounds and racehorses. The fact is, that my sporting life has been divided into well-defined eras. It is true that some of these have overlapped, and that, at times, hounds, hunters, racehorses, greyhounds, show and sporting dogs, guns, fishing-rods and hunting-horns have become inextricably mixed; but one or two particular pursuits have always dominated the rest.

In my childhood's and adolescent days I had but little to do with the equine element and all it portends and provides; but I was busy with rod and gun all the time. So when a cruel Fate made hunting and racing quite impossible for my finances to deal with, I fell back again upon the latter implements of slaughter. Hence the present book shows, *in medias res*, a hiatus in its chronological sequence, the gap being that period in which I was master of the M. and H. V. H., and, later, of the O. B. H., and when I was owning, training and riding my own horses under J. C. and N. H. Rules; although I did manage occasionally to put in a little desultory practice with rod and gun during that time. Such "side-shows" I have touched upon in the said "Chasing and

Racing"; but my chief activities with fur, feather and fin have been set forth herein.

I can only hope and trust that such rambling reminiscences as have been conjured up by sweet and bitter memories, will serve to cause some slight interest and amusement to those readers who patronize these pages; albeit I shall deem myself exceedingly lucky if I escape a charge of monotony and reiteration, pitfalls which have beset me constantly whilst stringing together a "story" which is no story at all, but simply a bunch of incidents depicted in fantastic monochrome. The shooting of bird or beast; the hooking, playing and landing of a fish; the details of a coursing thrill, and the excitements of a bumping race, afford the author very few materials with which to elaborate his "colour scheme"; for the reason that each and all of these ventures—in their respective spheres—bear a striking family likeness to one another. Such as they are, here they are. I can only beg for the same kindly indulgence that has been meted out to my other modest ventures with the pen.

THE AUTHOR.

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A SPORTSMAN AT LARGE

CHAPTER I

SHOW me a child of tender years who is keen on bird-nesting (not for the purpose of making decorative strings of eggs robbed from our dulcet songsters, and other homely birds), but one who is keen on observing and studying the habits and life history of the feathered flocks; who makes a well-arranged and carefully-classified collection, without depleting any one nest, however rare may be its feathered architects. Show me such an one, I repeat, and I will ear-mark him (or her, as the case may be) as an embryo sportsman or sportswoman.

But the afflatus is often manifested in other directions. A child may be keen on chasing butterflies for reasonable collective purposes. Here you have a fox-hunter of the future.

If he delights in sweeping the waters of the domestic duck-pond with a gauze net and rejoices over *ditisci*, caddis worms, dragonfly larvae, tritons, newts, snails and such small deer, you may be sure that, in course of time, he will blossom into an enthusiastic plier of the rod.

One who loves dogs will, as soon as he is old enough, want to train them to the amenities of sport. This one will be a huntsman, or a lover of the gun, or leash.

But he whose only ambition is to shine in games and pastimes, and who is content to ignore the children of Nature and their fascinating manners and customs, though he may become a great cricketer, football-player, boxer or athlete, assuredly will never be a *sportsman* in the true and legitimate sense of the term.

Happy is he who combines efficiency in field sports with proficiency in games, competitions and pastimes.

If what I have set down is a correct diagnosis of the inborn sportsman, I think I may fairly rank myself as a case in point; for, from my earliest days, I was a lover of living things, and all the glories and mysteries of the wild. But I regret to say, I so far dissembled my love, that I was able and willing to shed the blood of the beloved ones somewhat joyfully, when my sporting spirit so demanded.

On the other hand, before I became a hunter of the woods and waters with lethal intent, I delighted in gathering together a sort of miniature Zoo, which I fathered with loving care. I would take callow rabbits from their snug "stops" and reduce them to domesticity. I would secure birds by means of sieves, brick-traps and bat-folding nets, and confine the victims in capacious aviaries. Even the obnoxious mouse and the unspeakable rat were imprisoned and reformed; whilst patent "catch-'em-alive" traps, set in the fields and woodlands, provided me with a bunch of long-tailed field mice, voles (field and water), dormice and shrews. Many species of birds were brought up from the nest, my most successful rearings being crows, magpies, jays, starlings and jackdaws, together with thrushes, blackbirds and the various finches. Curiously enough, I could never bring a young *missel thrush* to maturity; while most of my starlings failed to survive their first moult. Of course I had many an aquarium containing small fish of the pond variety, with a host of beetles, larvae, crustaceans and other unconsidered trifles. Also vivariums in which sedate toads, saltatory frogs and agile lizards disported themselves.

But all the time my predatory instinct was alive, if as yet only sub-conscious. It manifested itself, in the first instance, in the form of a chronic angling obsession. Unless memory plays me false, the first fish that fell to my lure was abstracted from the ocean, but I did not "get away with it" as the Americans say. It happened thus:

I fancy that, at the time, I was aged about five years (the older one grows the more vivid are the memories of early events, some of which appear to have been of very trifling import), I was still under the command of "Nannie" (how devotedly and purely I loved that woman!). It was holiday time and our family bunch was absorbing ozone at Ryde, Isle of Wight. I had seen certain long-suffering optimists fishing from the pier, and longed to participate in their sport, such as it was. So I induced "The Mums" to fit me out with the necessary impedimenta (never trust a woman, however devoted, to provide you with cigars or fishing tackle, it is only asking for trouble!). My mother, of course, "did it all wrong." She produced a hank of line more suitable for hanging out clothes to dry, or for committing *felo-de-se* in the *Sus-per-Col* style, than for the lifting of miniature fishes from the vasty deep. The hooks, too, looked lonely without a joint of mutton or beef to garnish them.

But was my youthful and ardent soul dismayed? No! not on your life! Then came the question of bait. The keen eye of observation had conveyed to my budding intelligence that a worm was the one and only lure to command success, so, after much labour in the back yard, my sand spade unearthed sufficient of the succulent but repulsive wrigglers to serve my purpose. Soon Nannie and I took up position on the iron platform below the pierhead, where the emerald waters lapped upon the stanchions, and there I began operations. Hard by stood a little lad, a few years older than myself, also engaged in the gentle art, whose tackle was of such fine quality that I visualized some monster of the deep becoming attached and either pulling the youthful angler from his perch, to meet a watery grave, or smashing him and his line to smithereens.

For some time he gazed at my endeavours with contempt; but presently, pity for my ignorance gained the ascendancy. He approached Nannie and raised his cap most politely: "Excuse me, Madam," he said, "but your little boy will never catch sea fish with *earthworms*," (my spirits sank). "I have some *lug worms* here," he continued, "he is welcome to try them; the fish are not taking well. So far I have not had a touch."

I jumped at the offer. To add to my gratitude the young angler affixed a length of gut to my cable and bent on a reasonable hook which he baited with a lug. Hardly had the tempting morsel descended into the depths than I felt a decided " pull " and a tightening of my hand-line. Novice's Luck ! " Hi, little boy, you've got one," shouted the friend in need excitedly, " pull up ! pull up ! "

I responded as quickly as my baby hands could contrive, and, sure enough, as the business end of my line came into view, a silvery body was seen shimmering in the emerald water and soon it was within my grasp. I have never been able to determine to what species this, my very first fish, really belonged. I have a vague memory of a highly-coloured creature with considerable fin and tail; its total corporeal longtitude being about six inches. Possibly a small spotted dog-fish. I was in a state of supreme exhilaration and was for running off to display the victim of my prowess to the family circle; but Nannie intervened. " No, dearie," she said, " you caught this with that little lad's bait and hook. It is *his* fish for keeps ; not yours ! " My soul revolted, but Nannie's word, for the nonce, was law; so I was left lamenting. Her judgment was equitable; but I have always doubted if it followed the strict law of *Meum* and *Tuum.* I appealed, but my good nurse's judgment was upheld by The Mums and other female members of the family circle. For the time being I had to accept the decision of the court. Not satisfied, I took my case to the Upper House, as represented by " The Dads " ; but, though he was sympathetic enough, he decided that the appellant must be non-suited in conformation with " the statute of limitations."

That same dear old Dads was himself an ardent angler, and taught me much of the gentle art. He had, however, some weird fads, which he inflicted on my receptive brain, most of which I had to *unlearn.* One of them was that, in *striking*, the impetus should take a downward curve ; because, so he theorized, the suppleness of the top joint of the rod would cause it to spring up and so effect a quicker and more direct attachment of the hook to the fish's jaw. Well ! well ! well !

I fancy that this theory cost the old dear many a desirable fish ; but he stuck to the practice persistently.

Apropos my paternal progenitor, here is a story which illustrates his gentle and homely character. By the time I was eight years old, I was something of an artist at pond-fishing. At our picturesque home, Moat Mount, Highwood Hill—the highest point in the county of Middlesex—there are two sheets of water which I plied most industriously, one situated close to the mansion itself and dubbed the Barton (Zummerzet vur "varm") pond, contained roach, rudd and carp; the last named species affording specimens up to six or seven pounds. These were wily customers, the capture of which called for strategy and tactics of the most thoughtful and painstaking nature. But, even at that early age, I occasionally managed to outwit these corpulent fishes.

Came a day when I had been guilty of some unforgivable lapse, the deep-dyed turpitude of which was rendered even more unspeakable by reason of my having—in an attempt to avoid well-merited retribution—descended to a mendacity such as would have caused the late lamented George, of the Washington ilk, to turn in his distant grave.

So insufferable had been my backsliding on this occasion, that The Mums sorrowfully came to the conclusion that castigation, of a thorough and intimate character, was the only suitable penalty to meet the case. She insisted that her superior moiety should take upon himself the office of administrator. What is more, she provided a stout ashplant, which she thrust into his hands, bidding him seek the culprit and proceed to execution. Such an office was not altogether to the taste of The Dads. Indeed, he wandered off and took cover in a clump of rhododendron bushes; but the eagle eye of his life's partner was upon him, so he was routed out and admonished to get busy.

The June sun had just dipped below the horizon when I stealthily approached the swim in the Barton pond which I had baited up in the morning with boiled potatoes, kneaded up with stiff clay.

Soon the quarter-section of my wine-bottle cork was floating on the surface of the water, close inshore. I was on the *qui vive* for potential carp, but oblivious of what The Mums had figured out for my literal and metaphorical undoing.

There was a slight agitation of the cork and my heart throbbed.

Just then the figure of The Dads loomed on the adjacent bank. "Come here, Harding," he called icily, "your conduct has been audacious and atrocious. I feel it my duty to——"

"Shut up, Dads," I hissed under my breath, "I've got a bite!"

My parent's tone changed.

"Why, bless my soul, so you have, and I believe it's a carp, too. Don't be in a hurry; give him time!"

Carp bite slowly and deliberately. At first the flat cork radiated tiny, circling ripples; but after a time it began to glide stealthily along the surface, describing an eccentric course; then it became partly submerged:

"Now's your chance!" shouted The Dads excitedly. "Strike! Strike!" I obeyed the word of command smartly and the solid resistance which I felt told me that I was fast in a weighty fish. Almost immediately there was a great turmoil in the water, and my reel screeched as my victim sought the deepest hole in the pond. It was as much as I could do to hold on.

"Keep the point of your rod up, you little fool!" yelled The Dads as he danced on the bank. "If he gets it down he'll break you as sure as fate."

"Run for my landing-net, Dads, I left it on the other side of the pond."

Away went the learned Sergeant as fast as his legs and lumbago would allow him. Presently he returned with the necessary article.

Then he tried to induce me to hand him the rod; but I stuck to it uncompromisingly, and, after a strenuous battle, was able to bring the fish within my parent's reach.

The net was skilfully engineered, and the next moment a fine specimen carp of seven pounds was gasping on the grass. The Dads mopped his brow and clapped me on the shoulder.

"Well done, old boy!" (Beamingly.)

"Not so bad, eh, Dads? But what is that stick for?"

"This? Oh, I don't know. *You* can have it if you like."

That ashplant became the most treasured unit in my museum of curiosities.

No; although The Dads would take his quota of fur, fin or feather, legitimately and enthusiastically, he neither would nor could lay violent hands on his fellow mortals; though in the exercise of his judicial duties he was wont to deal out drastic punishment to offenders against the laws of the land; especially those found guilty of crimes of violence and cruelty to children and animals.

I busied myself with rod and line diligently; but a time came when vile saltpetre began to attract my attention very persistently.

It was my delight to accompany the shooting parties convened by my beloved parent and my half-brother Irwin.

The lands of Moat Mount were, for the most part, pasturage, so hardly could it be said that they offered anything like good partridge shooting; but all were keen, and as the shooting was over dogs, I found much delight in witnessing the operations and gleaning such items of knowledge as my seniors were able to impart by word of mouth or by practical demonstration.

Ten brace of birds to four guns, with a few rabbits and an occasional hare, marked the limit of expectations.

The very excellent coverts contained a few wild-bred pheasants; but when the season arrived, they were not driven in orthodox fashion. The raiders would line up, advance through the brushwood and take their chance of flushing a stray long-tail, which was more often missed than floored.

Naturally, in a very short space of time, the old cocks became wise to these primitive operations and utterly refused to take wing, running in front of the guns and dogs until they reached the limits of the wood, when they would rise and soar away, whither their fancy and their wings chose to take them.

Being an observant little lad, I duly noted this "retreating according to plan," so I determined to take advantage of my knowledge for the benefit of a cousin, a few years older than myself, who had been now admitted to the sacred ranks of the gun-men.

I lured him aside one day and led him off to that point where the aforesaid old cocks were wont to "do a guy," while The Dads, Irwin and another cousin, Charlie Gill by name, were making their painful way through the tangle and undergrowth of the covert.

Sure enough, as they approached in the distance, we heard a pattering of the pheasant feet on the fallen leaves, and presently, with a great to-do, a brace of beauties came up and over.

My pal missed them both like a man; but my acumen was indicated, though we were in great peril of being peppered by the advancing line, none of which had been advised of our change of position.

I soon grew tired of looking on, and burned to try my own skill and luck with the shooting iron. So far, an archaic, muzzle-loading pistol, the barrel of which screwed on to the breech, was the only weapon which I had dared to discharge on my own. It had cost me five shillings out of my weekly pocket-money, and had been purchased with the avowed intention of getting a bit of my own back on a certain ill-conditioned mongrel which used to lie in wait for me as I returned in the evening from my daily studies at Totteridge Park School.

This was a hateful creature. I both feared and loathed him; but my love of dogs forbade my adding a lethal lead to the charge of black powder which I crammed down the muzzle of my cherished weapon. I was prepared to terrify but not to slay the brute whose one ambition seemed to be to deprive me of a substantial portion of my stalwart calves.

So it came to pass that, when all was ready, I walked boldly past the enemy's ambush.

Sure enough, he came out with blood-curdling growls and yowls, and made for his objective. When he was within a yard of my understandings I loosed off! The effect was electrifying. The cur leapt up into the air, tucked his tail between his legs, and "beat it" at a speed which would not have disgraced a Waterloo cup-winner. In fact, you could not have seen him for the dust which he raised in his ignominious retreat.

Henceforth my passage between school and home, sweet home, was undisturbed by further attacks of this unspeakable and cowardly hooligan.

In the Armoury at Moat Mount there was an assortment of strange weapons, which The Dads had picked up at various sales. The dear old man had a craze for attending Christie's and other auctioneering establishments, and bidding boldly for an astounding quantity of rubbish of a very polyglot description. Hence the why and wherefore of the aforesaid firearms.

But my ambitious eye was upon them, and I determined to see which of them could be turned to practical use. Finally I selected what, I had been told by the purchaser, was known as a polygroove rifle. It had a long barrel which, indeed, was heavily rifled—of course it was a single barrel affair, and a muzzle-loader to boot.

The day came for the great adventure, when The Dads was safely away attending to his judicial duties and The Mums was taking her annual holiday, with my sisters, by the sad sea waves. Rank burglary had to be resorted to before I could commandeer my father's shot and powder, and even then I had to fashion a ramrod out of the ash stick which had been intended for violent application to my own vile body; but which, as stated, had been generously presented to me in more gentle fashion by The Dads.

But search as I would, no wads were to be found.

Was I to be thus frustrated of my evil intent? By no manner of means! I proceeded to insert in the barrel of my surreptitiously acquired weapon what I judged to be about three drams of black powder. On the top of this a wad of newspaper was tightly rammed, followed by a handful of No. 8 shot, with a similar incubus on top of it. Then I sallied forth.

As in the case of my angling, ambition did not suggest any victim more important than the first small bird which was unlucky enough to allow me to approach within what I considered to be reasonable range.

My first victim was a "blue-tit." It was busy on the summit of a small fir. If it was not singing "Tit-willow, tit-willow, tit-willow," it seemed, poor little chap, to be care free, and in full enjoyment of its brief span of life.

For a moment I hesitated to make it a target for the exploitation of my problematical skill; but I was now on "sport" (save the mark!) intent and saw red (or should I say "blue?"). Taking steady aim, I pulled the trigger. There was a terrific report, and when I came to, I found myself lying prone on my back. The treacherous polygroove lay by my side; whilst a few yards off, one of my paper wads was smouldering. My shoulder was dreadfully sore and my head ached consumedly; but I was keen on seeing what damage, if any, I had done to the innocent tit-mouse; so as soon as I could pull myself together, I began to search for signs of the murder which I had contemplated. Nothing was to be seen on the ground. The more humane tendency of my nature was leading me to experience a sense of relief, when I espied, on a branch of the fir, a yard above my head, a small bunch of pitiful, blue-green feathers, and on it one drop of blood sparkling in the sunshine, like a ruby of choicest water. It was all that remained of the dainty little bird. And I sat me down and wept.

Whether it was shame at my dastardly deed, or whether my shoulder was too sore to permit of further attempts with the polygroove, who shall say? Anyway, I beat a retreat, and after carefully replacing the primitive weapon and ammunition in the places from whence they respectively had come, I sought the seclusion of my solitary bedroom, there to reflect seriously on those commandments which forbid murder and also picking and stealing.

CHAPTER II

FOLLOWING my murderous attack on the innocent *parus ceruleus* (the blue-tit) I regarded the polygroove rifle with the oblique eye of suspicion. This was not the outcome of an uneasy conscience, I am sorry to say; but because my right shoulder showed an artistic blending of variegated tints; moreover, it ached sorely for many a day after it had experienced the recoil of that archaic weapon.

But my ardent desire to acquit myself bravely in the exploitation of powder and shot was in no way damped. I had seen a wonderful weapon in an ironmonger's window at Barnet (our nearest town, about four miles distant from Moat Mount), which excited my admiration, and, be it admitted, my cupidity.

The price was reasonable, viz., *twenty-five shillings*, all complete! It was a single-barrel muzzle-loader and, if outward appearances were to count for anything, that gun was "IT!" It was simply a blaze of varnish and burnished metal.

In those days, twenty-five bob meant a deal of cheeseparing and the strictest economy, if I was to save the requisite sum from my pocket money.

However, I had the whole of the Spring and Summer months to hoard my resources; but when August arrived I was still fifteen shillings short. A *deus ex machina* materialized in the majestic person of my maternal grandfather, Mr. Commissioner de Fonblanque, who was then past the eighty-year-old mark.

The learned judge was of portly proportions, and so short of breath that had he been a horse instead of a human being he would have been set down as a pronounced "roarer," and, my word, he *could* roar, when a particularly acute attack of gout afflicted him. At such times it was not safe to trust oneself within reach of his malacca cane. But when in normal health and spirits he was benign and urbane, and I could generally count on a golden sovereign every time he visited Moat Mount. Now when I found that my finances were not accumulating rapidly enough to ensure the purchase of the much-to-be-desired " shooting iron " before the season opened, I began to urge The Mums to press her father to honour us with a special visit, laying much stress on the love which I harboured for " Mr. Commissioner." This move of mine promised well, for my grandfather duly arrived and sojourned with us for over a week ; but though I waited on his lordship hand and foot, his hand failed to seek his pocket for the purpose of producing that desirable and necessary " jerry o' goblin."

As the time for his departure approached I grew reckless. I tried all sorts of expedients, and even descended to broad hints and outrageous flattery. When the family barouche bore him to the station, I jumped in and sat beside him, carrying in my arms a mysterious parcel. As I helped him into the train I proffered my offering with a touching little speech which I had mentally prepared.

" Oh, grandpa dear, I'm so sorry you are going away. It has been so nice having you with us. Will you accept this bunch of grapes." (I had surreptitiously burgled it from the vinery.) " You will find them very comforting and refreshing during the journey."

" Oh, thank'ee, thank'ee, mi'lad, that's very thoughtful of you. By the way, I suppose you are not above accepting a trifling donation ? Here's a sovereign for you ! "

Glory be ! The good thing had duly clicked !

The next day saw me the proud owner of the so-called gun, plus a pound of black powder, and ditto of No. 7 shot (I chose the size as being most suitable for any emergency. In this I think I was wise, as later experience has taught me, though I am aware that some sportsmen would prefer No. 6) for the purpose toward.

Now, I had not the least intention of blazoning to the world the tactics which I had figured out for my renewed attack on the creatures of the wild.

One early morning in the middle of August saw me sneaking out and far afield, whilst yet the senior members of the family were wrapped in slumber.

No tit-mice for me this time! Nothing less than a blackbird, a thrush, or perhaps, with luck, a wood pigeon, would satisfy my ambition. As matters turned out, one of the elusive "doves" did actually "fall for it." Of course it was a sitter, but none the less precious. I had several shots at blackbirds and thrushes on the wing, and never touched a feather. On the other hand, I carefully stalked a bunch of starlings which sat chattering and whistling on the summit of a dead tree. Much to my delight, three of them fell to my shot.

Then a disturbing thought obtruded itself. What was I to do with my bag? With the primitive instincts of a New Guinea cannibal, I was dead set on devouring the fallen; but I dared not acquaint my parents with the fact that I had taken to shooting with a real gun, without even saying: "By your leave."

At that time my paternal grandmother was at the head of the domestic commissariat and culinary department, since my mother was an invalid. The former was a fairylike little creature of the old-fashioned sort, saucy silvery curls, cap of the finest lace, and mittens, all complete. I remember that she had the most beautiful hands, and the brightest eyes I ever remember to have seen in one of her age. She was then well on in the eighties. She was of the ancient town of Taunton, and when she migrated to Moat Mount, she brought with her as cook an ancient serving maid, of similar age, typical of the brave county of "Zummerzetsheer."

Ere this, the original "Nannie" had been joined in holy wedlock to the coachman, and the happy pair had set up in a snug little country pub, not far remote from our home. Whereupon "Old Mary" had adopted me as her own particular pet so wholeheartedly that everything I might say or do was deemed by her to be absolutely correct, whilst every lapse from grace on my part was camouflaged, or passed over with loving leniency.

If Nannie was the first woman I ever loved, Mary was sure a good second, though I fear my passion was o'ercast by more than a shade of opportunism, inasmuch as her cunning hand devised many an enticing delicacy for my especial benefit; moreover, when in trouble or distress, I invariably fled to Mary's arms and wept out my sorrows on her gaunt bosom. So to Mary I went with my starlings and my wood pigeon, and in due course they were served up for my delectation. The former in a pie (rather bitter in flavour) and the latter made into a tasty salmi.

Now I must hark back a bit.

My love of dogs was, to a certain extent, an inborn trait; owing its origin to the laws of heredity; for The Dads was sure possessed of this amiable idiosyncrasy.

The first dog I ever recognized as such was a cherished animal belonging to my parent, which he averred was a Clumber spaniel, but which would have been hardly so rated by anyone possessing even the most elementary knowledge of the breed.

His name was Dash. I have no knowledge of the days of his youth, but I remember him as a rather plethoric and blear-eyed specimen of the canine race. According to his doting master, he had been a marvel on any and every species of game in his time, which was not mine! He was a kindly soul enough, but by way of testing his amiability I loosed off a gin-trap, teeth downwards, on the small of his back, whereupon he proceeded to bite me—good and hard!

With loud lamentations and according to custom, I fled to the arms of Old Mary and sobbed out my tale of woe. The tragic tale was conveyed to Grannie, and she, in turn, recited it to her son, conjuring him to have the offensive Dash executed there and then. The Dads was adamant, however, and was callous enough to declare that my lesion served me right. When I had thought it well over, I was magnanimous enough to agree, for my affection for the old dog was real enough.

But a compromise was arrived at. Dash was to be awarded C.B., chained to a kennel in the yard.

Then a feud arose between him and an aggressive old Cochin cock, lord of a harem of half-a-dozen barn-door hens. This vulgar bird used to marshal his seraglio, and descend on Dash's food. When the latter made a sortie from his entrenched position, with blood-curdling growls and gnashing of teeth, the cowardly birds would retreat until they were just beyond the length of his tether, and then the rooster would flap his wings and indulge in ill-timed crowing and struttings.

This struck me as being unreasonable, so I watched my opportunity, unfastened the old dog's bonds, and bidding him take up his position in his kennel and lie low, I awaited developments.

Issue was soon joined.

The enemy descended on the flesh-pots as usual, but when Dash, with no restraining chain, dashed out, there was a rare to-do. The retreat became a rout, and the blatant Cochin and his entourage were only just in time to escape dire disaster by hustling through the trap-door of the hen-run, where their enemy could not follow. But the raiders were not to be thus easily debarred from their forays. Their C.O., relying on the aforesaid trap-door, repeated the manœuvre, leaving Dash, thoroughly disgruntled, snarling defiance through the wire netting of the hen-run. Again human intelligence, as exemplified by a simple little child, was brought into play. This time I waited until the feathered felons were close on their objective, and then slipped over to their retreat and lowered the trap-door of their legitimate quarters; consequently, when Dash made his assault, their haven of safety was debarred them, and the gallant old dog had the time of his life! Such a clucking and squawking you never heard. Murder would surely have ensued had not Old Mary, at the head of her scullions, caused a diversion. As it was, the bumptious rooster was a sorry sight to behold, having lost the whole of his tail feathers and a goodly mouthful of lesser plumes. Thenceforth Dash was left in peace; but his hatred of the whole chicken tribe (except when cooked and garnished) remained unabated.

Dear little old Grannie was wont to say that Dash would eat up an old boot rather than that the fowls should have it.

Being of an inquiring and experimental turn of mind, I decided to put this theory to the test.

I dismembered a worn-out shooting boot belonging to The Dads and strewed the pieces in front of the old dog's kennel, calling out "Coup! coup!" and whistling, after the fashion of the ancient servitor whose job it was to minister to the fowls. Sure enough, Dash *did* devour the leather, to the last piece; but instead of being lauded for my investigation I was severely reprimanded, whilst Dash was subjected to a course of emetics and castor oil, with (be it happily said) satisfactory and obvious results!

When brother Irwin came down from Magdalene, Cambridge, he brought with him a black-and-tan terrier bitch, which he had possessed himself of at *alma mater*, not at all a bad specimen, probably provided by the then dog dealer of Parker's Peace. In my time the man in possession was named Callaby.

An ill-assorted union was arranged between Dido (for so she was called) and the ancient Dash, the result being a most ungodly nondescript which was called Toby. I adopted this humble mongrel from puppyhood, and grew to love him with an exceeding great love.

"Handsome is as handsome does" was sure exemplified in the case of Tobias, for he became one of the best aids to the gun I ever chanced across. Nothing came amiss to him; he was dead keen on fur and feather, had a wonderful nose and a faculty for exploiting it to the best advantage of the shooter; moreover, he was death on all vermin, and game as a pebble. He was a black and white and weighed about sixteen pounds only. One day he was accidentally shot by one of my cousins and seemed in a bad way. The Dads, who also loved him, brought him home in his arms. The poor little fellow was bleeding profusely and appeared very weak and limp.

I let myself go in a passion of grief, I snatched the patient from my father, when the undaunted and affectionate Toby rallied to lick my face with glad whines.

Happily his injuries were not so severe as they looked, and in less than a week my little pal was up and about again.

This brings me back to my essays with my newly-acquired tuppenny-ha'penny "shooting iron"—it would be gross flattery to call the thing a gun.

Having brought to bag a variety of feathered victims, I, naturally enough, began to cast longing eyes on the bunnies, which in those days were none too plentiful at Moat Mount. At last I determined to invoke the aid of Toby in my surreptitious expeditions. There happened to be an ice house situate hard by the Barton Pond, the thatching of which was honeycombed by a family of rabbits.

Many a time and oft I had incited Tobias to launch an attack on this stronghold, and on several occasions he had managed to set his teeth on a dilatory coney, 'ere it could hustle to safety. But I now wanted a more personal and intimate hand in the game.

All being prepared, I took my stand a convenient distance from the point where the quarry was wont to bolt, and then set Toby on the job. Nothing loth, he was soon at work, and presently out came brer rabbit. Up went the ironmonger's masterpiece, and with its deafening report the odoriferous coney turned head over heels in helpless contortions. My first rabbit!

With a yell of delight I threw down my weapon, rushed to the kicking coney, and seizing him by the hind legs, gave him a clip behind the ear, which promptly "did him in" for good and all. I was chortling with joy and pride, when, chancing to look round, I espied no less a personage than The Dads himself standing by the ice-house, with my cherished weapon in his hands. He was examining it carefully, and as he did so an expression of withering contempt crossed his usually amiable features.

"Well, you owdacious young scamp, what have you been up to now? What d'you call this thing?"

"Ah, isn't it a beauty, Dads? Something *like* a gun, eh?"

"Yes"—doubtfully—"*something* like a *gun*; but what is it? That's what *I* want to know?"

I was left guessing again.

"I don't know how you became possessed of the wretched thing," my parent went on; "but it's just God's mercy you are alive. How it happens that it did not burst and blow you to atoms goodness only knows! Not another shot do you fire out of it—understand that?"

"Oh, Dads! Please, Dads!" I whimpered. "It's a ripping gun. Why, I've just bowled over this rabbit"—holding up my victim—" with it; running, too!"

"Yes, I saw you; and a jolly good shot! But this thing is a death trap. You are full young to be shooting yet. Sit tight for a bit, sonnie, and by and by we will fix you up properly."

I had to be content with this vague concession, but my heart ached sorely for my twenty-five-bob "shooting-iron." It was not long, however, before the glorious vision conjured up by the last words of my beloved parent materialized—as presently you shall learn.

CHAPTER III

A SUDDEN flood of memory has brought back to my mind the why and wherefore of The Mums' determination that I, having been guilty of some particularly reprehensible conduct, should suffer corporeally at the hands of her mate, a punishment so well deserved, but which, as stated, failed to materialize.

It was in this wise.

One day, Cousin Ted and I, having possessed ourselves of about a pint of particularly juicy and well-developed lobworms, were conveying the same to the banks of the further fish-pond, when we chanced upon the under-gardener taking his well-earned mid-day siesta beneath the shade of a spreading chestnut tree.

Although we held the head gardener in awe and some respect, this subordinate was ever a mark for our practical jokes. He was a bucolic ancient of the typical home-country breed, whose life was rendered a burden to him by reason of our unrelenting pranks. There he lay, with his mouth wide open, and insulting the harmonies of nature with his raucous snoring.

He was asking for trouble, and he got it!

" Go on, Ted, drop a lob in his mouth," I urged.

No sooner said than done! The squirming of the reptile in its unaccustomed surroundings awakened the sleeper, who closed his toothless gums with a snap. As soon as he was wise to what had befallen, he spluttered out:

" Thish is too bar' o' you, Masr' 'Ardin'—I shan' swallow it, an' I shan' spir' it out. I sh'll jis' wait until yer pa comes 'ome and show 'im war'r you've done." (Translation: " This is too bad of you, Master Harding! I shan't swallow it and

I shan't spit it out. I shall just wait until your pa comes home and show him what you've done!")

Whether he kept his word as regards the swallowing or the alternative spitting, history does not relate. All I know is that the infamy of our behaviour was duly reported to The Mums, with what result you know. As for Ted, he, as usual, anticipated trouble by making himself particularly scarce until the affair had blown over.

I used often to attend the court when The Dads was occupying the judicial bench at the Clerkenwell (Middlesex) Sessions, and, as something of a student of humanity and criminology, I was greatly interested. At the time I speak of, which was later than that which I have so far dealt with, there were many notable counsel practising in his court (some of whom were then juniors), who afterwards became famous. Among them may be mentioned Mr. Mead, who was subsequently appointed a stipendiary magistrate, and for years sat at Marlborough Street Police Court; also "Willie" (afterwards Sir Charles) Mathews, who blossomed into Director of Public Prosecutions; but Montague Williams was already *it* in this and similar courts of justice. Here is a yarn, which illustrates the respect in which "Monty" was held by the criminal classes. A hefty burglar who had been caught *in flagrante delicto*, was invited to plead. Turning to the attendant warder, who shared the dock with him, he asked gruffly:

"Oo prosecutes?"

"Mister Williams," replied the minion of the law.

"Oh, GUILTY, milord," growled the criminal resignedly.

A young and callow wearer of the stuff gown arose from his seat on a back bench and addressed the court.

"The prisoner having pleaded guilty, milord," he began, "it only remains for me to detail——"

"'Ere! 'Oo the 'ell's that?" asked the prisoner, addressing the warder excitedly.

"Why, Mister 'Enery Williams, o' course."

"'Enery, 'Enery—Gawd! I thought it was Monty. 'Ere, NOT GUILTY, milord. Let the blighter 'av' a run fer 'is money!"

A contemporary of The Dads and a brother sergeant-at-law was that celebrated advocate Mr. Sergeant Ballantyne, and the two were great cronies.

On one occasion it happened that my parent was appointed chairman of a commission held in the provinces. This was before he was raised to the Bench, but under such circumstances he was allowed for the nonce full judicial authority and status. It happened that Ballantyne was arguing a case before him.

Bal.: "Now, milord, I wish to call your particular attention to the point which I have raised—I am sure your lordship will agree——"

Dads: "But I *don't* agree!"

Bal.: "But surely, Milord!"

Dads: "I *don't!*"

Bal.: "Oh, come, SERGEANT COX, you *must* see the force of my argument!"

Dads: "No, I don't. It has no bearing whatever on the case."

Bal.: "Oh, d—— it all, COX—do be reasonable!"

I am indebted to my good friend Judge Parry for this yarn. His Honour is, by the way, the son of another of the ancient order—Mr. Sergeant Parry to wit.

It is generally believed that my father was "The last of the Sergeants," but this is an error; there were two at least who were junior to him, and one or two (Gaselee and Robinson, I think) who survived him.

The Dads was a dreamer. His mind was always wandering into unexplored channels. Whilst actually occupying the Bench or engaged on some specific pursuit, he was the personification of concentrated energy; but as soon as that particular occupation was concluded, he would relax and allow his thoughts to soar far above earthly amenities.

Among other appointments which he held was that of Chairman of Quarter Sessions of the County of Middlesex. He used to drive to the court in a Stanhope phaeton drawn by his beloved cobs, Tommy and Pet.

It happened, one winter's afternoon, that he had a bunch of bookies before him, charged with illegal betting. The

Dads was dead keen on shooting and fishing, but a flutter on the Turf was, in his eyes, an abomination. So, having fined the backsliders all round very stiffly, he stalked out of the court-house and proceeded to enter what he *thought to be* his trap, when a corpulent Knight of the Pencil rushed up in great excitement.

"'Ere, I *say*, guv'nor," he bawled, "'old 'ard. You've fined me fifty quid—fer the love ov Mike, don't *pinch me blinkin' 'orses and trap!*"

It chanced that the bookie's tits were—like Tommy and Pet—a bay and a grey respectively. In the dusk of the declining day my respected parent had "fallen for it."

As a judge, The Dads invariably endeavoured to temper the wind to the shorn lamb. I remember, on one occasion, being in court, when after sentence had been pronounced, a notorious burglar thus addressed him:

"Thank 'ee, Milord, I can do it on my 'ead, though you 'ave give me a pretty stiff stretch; but, bless yer, I'd raver cop twelve months 'ard from yer Lordship than 'alf of it from any other blinkin' bench bounder. Yer does it so damned affable like."

But it was not always so. One day I was beside him on the seat of the mighty, when a tough old lag (Buckley by name), who was evidently dissatisfied with what had been awarded him, as the consequence of his lawlessness, stooped down in the dock, and before one could say "knife," or the attendant warder could restrain him, had removed his clod-hopper boot, and sent it hurtling at the head of the Majesty of the Law, as represented by my gentle parent.

The hob-nailed missile passed harmlessly between his head and mine, and found its billet on the wainscotting behind the judicial chair, where it landed with a resounding crash. The learned judge, who was busy recording the sentence, looked up without moving a muscle, murmuring mildly:

"Buckley, Buckley, I'm surprised at you!"

What a nerve, and *what a man!*

CHAPTER IV

MY birthday happens to fall on the penultimate day of August. Between the occasion of my foray on the ice-house and that date I had been left guessing whether, or when, I should next have a chance of loosing off a gun, and had sorrowfully come to the conclusion that once again I should have to possess my soul in patience, what time I could only watch my elders—and alleged betters—attempting the death of sparsely scattered birds and bunnies when St. Partridge's Day should arrive; therefore, my anticipation was not of a very ardent quality. So I retired to rest on the 31st, without experiencing those thrills of excitement which are apt to drive slumber from the eyes of the most weary of small boys, who is assured of participation in the onslaught of "The First." I slept like a top.

But I was early awake. The first object on which my eyes fell was a long, brown, flax-cloth case beautifully bound with burnished brass.

I leaped out of bed, bent on closer investigation.

There was affixed thereto a plate, on which was inscribed the following touching legend:

"HARDING DE F. COX,
FROM
"HIS LOVING FATHER,
On the occasion of his 12th Birthday."

With trembling fingers I unfastened the strappings, plied the key which was attached to the handle, and lifted the lid.

What a glorious sight met my eyes!

There, in its green-baize bed, was a beautiful single-barrel pin-fire, twelve bore, with fittings complete. Glory be!

Rushing to The Dads room, I rudely awakened him and poured out my gratitude in an incoherent torrent.

The learned Sergeant was coyly overwhelmed.

"There, there," he said, "that will do! It's more than you deserve; but, bless me, after seeing you bowl over a rabbit with that death-trap of a weapon, I thought I would give you a chance, though, really, you are far too young and reckless to be trusted with a gun of your own. You know the rules of the game, see that you keep to them. Now run along, there's a good chap, and be ready to start an hour after breakfast."

Was I ready? You bet!

But The Dads was not.

Irwin and my Uncle Gill (irreverently known by the prefix "Gaffer" vice "Uncle") were waiting with Ward, the keeper, and his assistant. With them was old Sancho, a liver-and-white pointer, which had been a stand-by for many seasons past, but who was now somewhat archaic. He was a staunch and reliable old fellow, as slow as a man, but a sticker and a tryer all the time, although occasionally he would play a well-worn practical joke on the shooters by freezing on to—*nothing!* Then when the forces, with beating hearts and on the tip-toe of expectation, converged on his point, he would break it, and amble off with a derisive wave of his tail, as who should say, "Sold again!" There was a time when such deliberate frauds on the innocent met with well-merited punishment in the form of an ash-plant, laid on hard and good; but latterly the dignity which is supposed to attach itself to *Anno Domini* forbade such drastic measures. Now a gentle word of reproof, accompanied by a glance of sorrowful reproach, was all he had to fear for the award of his backslidings.

At last, The Dads, who had been engaged with the village policeman in a mysterious matter which had to do with some local miscreant, joined us in the yard. At the last moment the ever-ready Toby, who had been locked up as one unfitted for the sport toward, broke barracks, rushed up, and began caressing our gun barrels one by one, as was his wont.

A gun was a fetish to Tobias.

He was about to be relegated to durance vile, loudly protesting, when I intervened, and begged that my little pal might be allowed to accompany us—if only as an onlooker.

So it was agreed that if he was kept on a lead and not permitted to take any sort of hand in the game, his presence would be tolerated.

He was handed over—much to his disgust and mine—to the tender care of the under-keeper Hedges, and then the cavalcade moved off.

The beat which had been selected as our objective was known to hold three coveys, and three only. The habitat of one of these had been carefully noted, so that Ward was able to take us straight to the pasture, where it was good odds on its being found.

It was a field of "rowan" (second crop of grass), which afforded very good cover. The keeper confided to us that the covey which lurked thereabouts consisted of twelve units, including the "old birds"—"Unless," so he said, "they durned old foxes" had depleted its strength. Sure enough, old Sancho, as soon as he had sniffed the air, began to steady his quarterings, and was soon drawing on the birds.

Presently he pulled up, stiffened, and became as a dog modelled in bronze.

I had been placed on the extreme left, with The Dads my next-door neighbour. He was determined that if I was fated to slay anyone it should be his fond parent; but I had no intention of qualifying as a parricide.

Gaffer Gill, armed with an antique muzzle-loader, was next in the line, whilst brother Irwin, who "did not half fancy himself" as a shot, was on the right flank. The line advanced.

Toby, who from the first had bitterly resented the restraining leash, suddenly gave a leap forward, dragging it out of Hedge's hand. He put in an amazing sprint, passed the line of shooters, ignored Sancho's staunch stance, flew past the old dog, and giving vent to a shout of canine exultation, dashed into the covey, which rose, with piercing "cheer-r-r-whits!" just out of shot.

Irwin's remarks were not fit for publication.

Even the generally imperturbable Dads was heard to ejaculate: " D—— the little beast ! "

Well, at any rate, the delinquent had succeeded in scattering the birds in all directions, and as our trusty henchman had carefully marked down four brace of them, a good chance of taking toll was afforded.

It is sure an ill wind that blows nobody any good !

As often was the case in those parts, partridges, when thoroughly scared, were wont to take cover in the hedgerows, and so it happened on this auspicious occasion. So now a new method of attack was devised.

The Dads and I were on one side of the fence, whilst Irwin and Gaffer Gill were on the other; but lo ! and behold, although we traversed its whole length, and though Ward and Hedges were busy with their sticks, not a feather fluttered; for the said hedge was thick and " blind," with a deep ditch overgrown with blackberry brambles on our side. Both dogs had been taken up, but now my precious little mongrel was to come into his own. After some demur he was loosed, and immediately set to work on the lee side of the fence. Sure enough, we had not gone fifty yards before he pulled up and gave most obvious signs that he had discovered the lie of a lurking bird. As we came up, he dashed in.

" Look out, Irwin ! " shouted The Dads. Next moment a report on the far side of the hedge was heard, followed by my brother's exultant " Got 'im ! "

The first bird of the season !

Further on, Toby, who had issued on the other side, in hopes of chawing up the victim (in which nefarious endeavour he was thwarted by the agility of Ward), made another dash, and this time a bird bustled out our way. It seems that The Dads and I loosed off simultaneously. But I was not aware that my parent had fired. Down came the bird and I was puffed up with pride.

" Bravo, old boy ! " exclaimed The Dads, " that was a grand shot ! " Then I noticed that my parent was reloading.

" Did you fire, Dads ? " I asked, somewhat crestfallen.

" Why, yes, dear boy ; " quickly adding, " but I know I missed. It's your bird all right ! "

Now I had always regarded the learned Sergeant as one whose word could be implicitly relied upon; but now I had my doubts; moreover, my newly-acquired weapon had given my shoulder a punch which revived painful memories of the unspeakable polygroove; whilst the second finger of my right hand showed a conspicuous and highly-coloured bump.

The light, single-barrelled weapon, carrying a fully-loaded cartridge, was bound to cause a very severe recoil, one which was far too great a tax on the endurance of a little boy of twelve.

But I meant to have another go. The opportunity soon arose, but I missed my bird like a man, and again my shoulder and finger suffered severely.

Then I began to funk, which destroyed any chance I may have possessed of legitimately accounting for " a kill " on my own; moreover, " gun-headache " now afflicted me sorely; so I had to " cry a go."

I lay down under a haystack at the luncheon interval, and was seized with such nausea that neither solid nor liquid refreshment appealed to me in the least.

The grown-ups were very solicitous and a council of war was held.

Irwin handled my gun and pronounced it too long in the stock; whereby the butt could not be properly placed when I " threw up."

A brain-wave came to Gaffer Bill. " The boy must have the stock shortened and the charge reduced." This was agreed.

No more shooting for me that day; but a few days later I was again on the war-path. The stock of my gun, now shortened, fitted my shoulder to a nicety, whilst my cartridges carried a greatly reduced charge. I tried it on bye-days, selecting as my intended victims unfortunate blackbirds and thrushes which the keepers beat out of the hedgerows for a trial of my marksmanship. Of these I gave a fair account; so that when once more I joined the shooting-party my confidence was restored, and I was determined to bring a partridge to book, under circumstances such as would make it absolutely certain that it was I, and I alone, who had accomplished the deed. And this is how I contrived it.

We were after covey No. 2—one of about eight birds only. They had risen to Irwin and Gaffer Bill, so that neither The Dads nor I had a chance of loosing off at them ; but, as on the previous occasion, the survivors had scattered promisingly. One bird came back, over our heads, unobserved by any of the party save myself ; but I marked him (it turned out to be the old cock) carefully, into a small, triangular patch of mangolds.

Waiting my opportunity and taking Toby with me, I slipped away from the others, waited until they were lost to sight, if not to memory dear, and then made for the said roots, which I carefully walked across and across ; but devil a partridge was forthcoming. I was just about to " chuck it," thoroughly defeated, when I noticed the faithful Tobias with ears well cocked and stumpy tail violently oscillating, a hundred to the second, marking something in a stack of pea-sticks at the end of the patch.

" Ah," thought I, " a bunny ! I'll have his blood ; better half a loaf than no bread ! "

Next moment there was a fluttering and whirling of wings, and then, with plaintive " chir-r-r whits," out came the desirable old cock. He gave me a fair chance, and, to my intense joy, he fell to my shot. No doubt about it this time ! Then there was a pretty race between Toby and myself to the fallen bird. I knew how quickly my mongrel would dismember the prey, given half a chance.

He won by a bare length, but I was so close up that, as soon as he set teeth in the bird, and before he could effect any serious damange, I had him by the throat and choked him off.

My first partridge !

Oh, I *was* a happy lad !

CHAPTER V

THREE years previous to this mild adventure, having reached the mature age of nine, I was sold into the slavery of scholastic life. Up to that time I had run wild. My half-brother, Irwin, had just come down from Magdalene, Cambridge, and, as he was eighteen years my senior, he was, naturally enough, inclined to be aloof and patronizing in his attitude towards me; although he did occasionally condescend to take me angling, and to teach me the wiles of fishes and the most effective methods of out-manœuvring them. On the other hand, I was constantly raising his wrath by my persistent raids on the game preserves, such as they were; for I was a persistent and pernicious poacher. After all, it has been said that a *poacher is only a good sportsman turned inside out;* so this reprehensible trait must not be writ too large against me.

Long before I made that memorable onslaught with the polygroove, I had secretly cherished ferrets, had contrived rabbits' nets, and, with the mongrel Tobias, had accounted for several dozen conies, the stock of which, never very plethoric, showed a lamentable diminution, owing to my malpractices.

It was some time before Irwin's suspicions as to the cause of the scarcity of fur were fully aroused; but when once satisfied that professional poachers had nothing to do with the decline of the said stock, he began to practise the sneaking methods of the sleuth.

One day, a hooligan cousin (one Edward Gill, son of the Gaffer of that ilk) and I were busy in one of the coverts, where we imagined that our operations would be well-screened. Our best fitch ferret was in, and we could hear Brer Rabbit scuttling about subterraneously, as is his wont when his vicious enemy sets about him. We were on the alert for the sudden bolt and consequent enmeshment in our well-placed snare, when suddenly an icy voice spoke up, close in our rear. It was Irwin, in all the majesty of outraged virtue.

"Here, you young ruffians, what the h—— are you doing? You infernal young poachers! Take that . . . and that!!!"

The first "that" was a sound clout on the ear for me, which sent me sprawling. The second "that" was a hefty kick on the only visible portion of Edward's anatomy—that young sport being half-way down the main earth, listening to the scrap which was going on below. He withdrew himself with a yell of anguish and sprinted off into the thicket. The indignant Irwin took no further notice of his little brother Harding; but, seizing the ferret line, jerked it so violently that our cherished pet was like to lose his head. As it was, he was incontinently snatched from his encounter with Mr. Coney, and the last I saw of him was being swung round and round at the end of the string, like an animated catherine wheel, by my infuriated brother as he stalked away.

I always held a wholesome dread of my half-brother; though he was generally of a cheery and good-natured disposition. Even when I was a grown man this feeling survived to some extent.

My parents, wishing to acclimatize me to the amenities of school life, sent me to Totteridge Park as a day boarder to begin with. As The Dads passed and repassed it morning and evening, when driving his smart cobs to and from Barnet Station, I generally enjoyed a lift each way.

It was not long before I had my first fight. My opponent was one Georgie Roberts, to whom I had taken an instant and intense liking; but as is so often the case with sworn pals of the schoolboy persuasion, we fell out about some trifle and came to blows.

Now, even in those days, I was inflicted by nature with a decidedly prominent proboscis. There never has been any necessity to "land me one on the point" (as located by the experts of The Ring) in order to "put me to sleep." A well-directed fistic impact with my nasal organ was sufficient. Such a blow would immediately render me *hors de combat*, blind and bleeding.

It was winter time, and George was wearing a red worsted muffler. He just missed the mark, whereupon I decided to take no further risks, so seized him by the flaming " comforter " and proceeded to do my best to choke the life out of him. He was rescued just in time by the headmaster's wife. They put me in Coventry for three days for this lapse of sportsmanship. I richly deserved it, but Roberts was of a forgiving nature, and was the first to plead for my return to general companionship and conviviality. I was really fond of this little lad, and cried myself to sleep when he departed from the school.

My first fight and my first unrelated friend.

After a time I became a boarder at Totteridge; but was permitted to spend the week-ends at dear, beloved Moat Mount. Though Irwin was only my half-brother, I had two full sisters, Ada and Florence; whilst another, Alicia, whom I cannot recall, fell a victim to diphtheria when only nine years of age, poor little soul!

Ada (who was nine years my senior) at that time did not favour me with much of her society. I think she was too busy looking for " a soul's mate; " but Florrie, on the contrary, was a real pal. She, too, was much older than myself, and of a highly religious turn of mind. She would accompany me fishing, bird-nesting, butterfly-collecting and what not.

Both girls were keen ornithologists, and it was they who taught me the art of rearing callow fledglings from the nest to maturity.

I was about twelve years old when we lost Florrie, through some mysterious renal trouble.

I was utterly disconsolate!

They took me to her funeral, and this so depressed me that the memory of the mummery haunted me day and night for many months. I then and there took unto myself an oath, never to attend another funeral unless and until forced to do so, owing to circumstances over which I have no control—and then it should be as principal . . . feet first!

Shortly after this, my first great grief, I was transferred to Elstree School, which was situated about three miles from Moat Mount. Here again, I was allowed an " exeat " every fortnight, and returned, on those occasions, to my cherished home, full of joy and thanksgiving.

At this preparatory school I began to take an interest in sports and pastimes unconnected with the pursuit of the wild; such as cricket, football, athletics, prisoner's base, marbles and pegtop spinning; being most successful in the first and last of these; though I had a decided *penchant* for marbles. Here was the gambling spirit revealing itself. My combative bumps swelled, and I grew keen as mustard on acquiring, through my skill, the bulk of my school-fellows' store of alley taws, blood-alleys and other desirable trophies. I was a bit of a knut too, at "Conquerors." I invented a method of pickling my horse chestnuts which rendered them quite pachydermatous and impervious to the impact of my opponents' "champions."

At that time, Elstree School was administered by the Rev. Thompson Podmore, a great believer in the "spare the rod, spoil the child" theory. Nothing he loved better than to hear his stiff cane lash on the outheld hand of a delinquent. Such would raise a great blood-blister, which generally put that particular member out of action for a week. But I was in "Pod's" good graces and was never called upon to obey the command: "hold out your hand!"

I may say, here and now, that not once during my boyhood (or since, of course) was I subjected to corporal punishment, by the various masters who had authority over my person; though all three schools, Totteridge, Elstree and Harrow, were given to the practice of physical torture. Perhaps it was because I was a very small boy and looked extremely delicate (which I sure was not!) that caused the pundits to refrain from the assault and battery of my flesh; and yet I was always "asking for it." Some people, like cunning horses, when severely pressed, are given to looking out for "rat holes" in which to take refuge, and they generally find one. I think I must be of this kidney. Of one thing I am quite certain, and that is, that it was not my transcendant virtue or amenability to discipline which saved me from painful inflictions on my epidermis.

I am an antagonist of corporal punishment on horse, dog or human child. As regards the last-named, it is a point of honour in a public school that a boy should not funk "a swiping," but rather enjoy it, and boast of it—so *cui bono?*

If a temperamental lad does allow fear to obsess him, more harm than good is sure to accrue; for thus his nervous system may be dangerously affected. But there is worse behind. Every physiologist knows that, in some cases, the birch acts as an aphrodisiac and a stimulant to sexual disturbance. Such reaction is likely to occur, not only in the case of the patient, but *also in that of the agent.* Many cases of sexual degeneracy have been traced to flagellation.

Putting this very real danger aside—Is it not highly degrading for a Doctor of Divinity to constitute himself sworn torturer and inflicter of lesion on the "head's antipodes" of an adolescent schoolboy? If corporal punishment really *is* necessary, which (except in the case of deliberate brutality to child or animal) I very much doubt; should not the operation be performed by the school porter, or "custos?"

The High Sheriff is expected to hang a felon convicted of wilful murder, only when the common hangman is not available. I have yet to hear of a governor of a gaol who insists on wielding the cat-o'-nine-tails himself, and who glories in the deed, as do our most revered and reverend head masters!

I am afraid that the Rev. Thompson Podmore was not making much of a success of Elstree during the final year of his tenure. For this, or some other reason, he arranged to turn the school over to the Rev. Launcelot Sanderson, a Harrow master. At the time, I was nearly head of the school, and a member of the cricket eleven, with a decimal average. I thought myself fairly primed with scholastic knowledge; but when the Rev. Launcelot came to have a look around, he evidently thought otherwise, for he informed me that unless I bucked up, I might well be "spun" for the Harrow entrance examination.

This "put the wind up" me as the saying goes, and I grew uneasy. When the day of trial and tribulation arose, I was in a neurasthenic state, which was rendered the more acute since I was suffering from one of those devastating headaches which were prone to overcome me periodically during the time

I was "in my teens." The consequence was that my examination papers were by no means up to the mark; whilst I was mentally paralysed when I faced the mighty "Head" (the Rev. Theobald Butler) for the *viva voce* test. I could not take my mind off the remarkable resemblance of the examiner to the counterfeit presentments of Jesus of Nazareth, as depicted throughout the ages.

At last it was finished, and I awaited judgment with fear and trembling.

"Lit-tel boy," began the great and fearsome man, in his curious, cooing voice, "I have decided to pass you into the school, because you have reached the age limit for entrance, and you would not have another chance; but it is more as an act of grace than because of any sign of intrinsic merit which you have displayed. If your dear parents inquire where you have been placed, say the Third Form:—*It is the lowest in the school!*"

Of a truth it was not only the lowest in the school, but was a veritable home for lost dogs of the most hopeless kind. There were only two other unfortunates so branded with utter incompetence. One was George Capell, who afterwards succeeded to the Earldom of Essex, and Charlie Blacklock, who ultimately reaped a considerable fortune through the publication of that wonderful but rather intricate *vade mecum*, "Bradshaw's Guide." The first-named greatly distinguished himself by establishing a record, as he came out *bottom of the school for three terms running;* whilst Charlie (with whom in after years I fraternized on the plains of Altcar) remained in the select coterie, as *proxime accessit*, or runner-up, for the wooden spoon, until advised to quit as a hopeless dunce.

It was not so with your Uncle Cockie, however; for it soon became evident that his private trial was all wrong and that Dr. Butler had not formed an accurate estimate of his true form.

As "The Third" was so numerically and mentally weak, it did its work with "The Third-Fourth;" consequently the combined "field" numbered some two dozen boys. I was determined to wipe out the insult imposed upon me by inclusion with the aforesaid George and Charles, so I became ultra studious, with the happy result that, the very first week, I came out head of the coalition. I was immediately raised a peg, and at the end of the term, was only beaten a short head by a little pal of mine called Wells. The next term we were both honoured with " *a double* remove."

This placed us in " The First Fourth " then handled by the benevolent, but somewhat eccentric Rev. John Smith, whom all Old Harrovians of his time will bear in reverent and affectionate remembrance.

John was of a highly religious turn. It was his custom to interview new boys in the school library, there to warn them against the wiles of the devil and the temptations of the flesh.

For some reason or other, he hit upon me as a " sub " who should act as guide, philosopher and friend to shy and diffident new boys. I am afraid his confidence in " Little Father Cox " (as he had dubbed me) was sadly misplaced ; for my doctrines had more to do with the evasion of discipline and the revelation of discreditable methods of outwitting authority, than the inculcation of those tenets which dear old John held so dear and desirable.

If one was late for school, one had to stand on a form, *coram populo*, and repeat a hundred times : " It is as easy to be a minute too soon as a minute too late," and if, on the inevitable morning inspection, one's finger nails were found to be in deep or even half-mourning, one had to recite " Cleanliness is next to Godliness " a like number.

I had only one term with John Smith, for the previous " running " came out to the tick, according to *book* form (rather neat quip this) ; for Wells and I finished first and second. Once more he pipped me on the post by a short head. Again we went up two places in the form schedule ; but now we were separated, for I found myself in " The First Shell B " of which my house master, the much beloved " Boz " (Bosworth Smith) was in command ; whereas my rival was allocated to " The First Shell A " (" Billy " Hutton's).

I was rather a favourite with Boz, both in the house and in form ; I think because I professed a profound interest in Gibbon's " Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire," which classic work was a second Bible to my house master.

Having me now under his hand, he was not keen on relinquishing the hold; so I had to stay two terms in his form; the first check to my meteoric rise in the scholastic firmament. Thence, through the Removes and the Fifths I progressed, finally coming to a standstill in "The Second Fifth" ("Vanity" Watson's).

So much for my more erudite education. Now about my exploits "out of school." "Villainous saltpetre," as you know, had an irresistible attraction for me, so I elected to join the School Cadet Corps and take up rifle shooting.

The weapon served out to us was the "Long Sneider;" rather cumbersome, but very accurate. In those days, in the recruits' classes, one had to fire *standing*, at the shorter ranges. The rifle was considerably longer than myself, so it was a good thing that I was strong in the arm, or I should have failed to bring it to shoulder and keep it steady; but I successfully overcame such physical difficulties, and scored quite respectably in all my classes, finally achieving the honour of the marksman's badge. What is more, I was tried for "The XI" and shot in the preliminary matches with quite consistent success. The time came when the final selection of Harrow representatives for Wimbledon had to be made. I was on tenterhooks, for it came to my ears that the two masters (Messrs. Holmes and Bull), who represented the staff, were dubious about including such a microscopic lad as myself; for they feared that when it came to the contest for the Ashburton Shield, I might be overcome with "stage fright," or afflicted with one of my "knock-out" headaches. But there was no getting away from my average, which stood second on the list. I had a staunch friend in our C. O., Capt. "Cherry" Trench, who insisted on my being given my "blue." I shall never forget my elation when, calling at the office of *The Harrovian* (then edited by my now club friend, Walter Sichel), I was shown by him the list of selections. I was high up therein. Glory be!

Came the great day, and it was a scorcher!

Among my comrades were Trench, Harrison, Cunliffe, Apcar, Todd, Hayward, Porteous, Bailie-Hamilton and Blewitt (Bill of that ilk).

In those days the conditions were, five shots at 200 yards (standing) and five shots at 500 yards (any position). Our instructor was Sergeant-Major Gilder, the winner of many an important event at the annual Wimbledon gala. He was an advocate for the " feet first " position. The shooter lay on his back with his feet towards the target, the rifle butt resting in the right armpit, the barrel passing along the body and between the drawn-up legs. The head was supported by the left hand, whilst the right manipulated the alignment.

Now this position may lend itself very conveniently to long-range, small-bore shooting ; but experience has taught me that, for the shorter ranges and service competitions, the ordinary prone position is to be greatly preferred.

Nevertheless, Gilder had coached us well in his pet method, and had been particularly attentive to myself.

At 200 yards I managed to put on five centres, three of which were only a fraction from the " bull."

At that time, there were three scoring circles only, viz., the Bull, the Centre and the Outer. " Magpies " had not been invented. At 500 yards I found the bull first shot and it looked well for my prestige.

This I followed up with two centres and then another bull.

I was as steady as a rock, but my last shot let me down. I suppose I was a bit over anxious. I drew a good bead for a bull ; but held my breath too long before pressing the trigger. Instead of taking a rest and a breather, I let off rather jerkily. Luckily, I found the target ; but a very wide outer on its left edge was signalled.

This was exasperating. Had I registered another bull I should have claimed " cock score " and have shot for the Spencer Cup. Moreover, Harrow would have won the Ashburton Shield. Even a centre to my score would have given us a tie ; but as it was, Winchester " short-headed " us.

Still, no other member had exceeded my total, though I had to share the honour of " cock score " with Hayward, Cunliffe and Todd. A dead heat between four !

CHAPTER VI

WHEN the excitement had passed, I wandered about with one of our team and watched some of the competitions which were proceeding. Among these was the Graphic prize, which in those days was open all day, like the pool shooting. Anyone could enter if able to find " seven bob and a tanner."

" Have a dart, Spadger " [my pet name " Cockie " had not arrived then, the term " Spadger " being an abbreviation of " Cock Spadger " (or sparrow), derived from my surname]. " Have a dart and try your luck ! "

Well, the only coins of the realm which remained in my pocket were a half-crown and a shilling in silver, and fivepence-halfpenny in bronze. This impecuniosity I had to admit, when my pal became insistent ; whereupon the generous lad " came across with " the balance, on condition that if any dividend accrued I was to adopt the " fifty-fifty " principle.

So I procured a voucher and took up my position on the mat. The conditions were seven shots at two hundred yards, prone.

Now I thought that if I could make an average of centres at the distance standing, I might perchance make a " possible " under these far easier circumstances.

Sure enough, a " bull " was signalled to my first shot. What is more, I followed with five more of the desirable cattle ; but, alas ! my last shot just missed the inmost circle. Eagerly we scanned the scores, and, strange to say, we found that no " possibles " had been registered that day.

Unfortunately for us, the competition remained open the following one, when three objectionable interlopers put in a clean card. So that was that !

I could only congratulate myself on having put up a good show, but I and my pard were seven-and-six down, desperately thirsty, and not a mag left to expend in ginger-beer; so we had to cadge around among the other members of the team, in order to lubricate our parched throats.

I looked to making a mighty mark the following year, but meanwhile Messrs. Holmes and Bull (known respectively among the boys as "Skipper" and "Mishter Bullsh"—the latter on account of his imperfect pronunciation of "st") were seized with a brain-wave which turned out disastrously. They decided on scrapping the good old Long Sneider and adopting a horrible weapon—the Short Martini (converted).

Not only did this beastly contraption administer a kick which would have done justice to a petulant camel (the Arabs say that a man can recover from anything save the kick of one of these "grousing" and ill-conditioned beasts), but was terribly inaccurate. At two hundred yards the defect was not so noticeable, but at five hundred yards it was only too obvious.

I struggled against adversity and gun headache for some time, but at last determined to abandon so hopeless a proposition. Good Sergt.-Major Gilder was in despair. When the contest for the Ashburton Shield came round again, Harrow was conspicuous "down the course." "So I had reason," as my French ancestors were wont to assert.

I then turned my attention to cricket, a game to which ever have I had a leaning. I played for my House, and made some show as a bowler and as a safe and quick "holder" in the short field—especially point; but it was not until the "Shell"—in which I then was—played the "Fifth" that I made a real stir, for in that classic contest *I took nine wickets for two runs!* This led to a trial for the School, but my hoped-for brilliance with the leather must have been a mere flash in the pan, for I quite failed to "produce the goods" when called upon. Incidentally, I may mention, that as a Harrow batsman, I was the veriest of "rabbits"; but in later days, when the School-on-the-Hill and Alma Mater were left far behind, I entirely lost the art of trundling, but became a hefty wielder of the willow, and made some very respectable scores for The Thespids and other clubs; though I never succeeded in claiming a century—seventy-five not out being the best record to which I can point.

We of the said Thespids were a merry team of Mummers. Our captain, Aubrey Smith (known as "Round-the-Corner-Smith," on account of his eccentric approach to the crease when bowling), was a host in himself—a Cambridge cricket Blue and captain of Sussex County. Bobby Evett (who had a reprehensible habit of running me out—we generally opened the innings together), O'Neill, Oscar Asche, John Drinkwater, senior, and poor Jimmie Blakeley and Harry Nye Chart, were some of those who wore the green-and-purple colours of the Dramatic team with grace and distinction.

To return to Harrow. There came a day when I was to witness a sad tragedy. A boy called Cotterell was umpiring at the playing end and standing by short leg. Willie Blacker, one of the best bats in the eleven, hit one square and very hard. Before poor Cotterell could duck, the ball caught him full behind the left ear. He threw both hands up to his neck and then fell forward on his face—*stone dead!* This dreadful accident caused a deep depression in the school. It happened shortly before the Eton and Harrow match. Blacker swore he would never touch a bat again; but wiser counsels prevailed, and he not only went up to Lords as one of our most cherished representatives, but "made good" handsomely in both innings.

My last term at Harrow was not altogether a happy one, for I was afflicted constantly with headaches of such severity that I was continually being prostrated. Medical skill brought but little relief, and our school "saw-bones" (Dr. Drinkwater) was quite unable to diagnose the cause of the trouble or to mitigate its effect. My own opinion is that it arose through acute dyspepsia set up by the badly-cooked food served to us. "Boz" was too obsessed by his worship of Gibbon, and his wife too busy bearing him children, to properly superintend the House cuisine. *Hinc illæ lachrymæ.*

On my return to my beloved Moat Mount I speedily recovered my normal state of health.

Before abandoning my reminiscences of Harrow, I cannot resist the temptation to slip in a good story or two *à propos* our distinguished "Head," Dr. Butler.

He had a peculiar and distinctive manner of speech which, to be appreciated, had to be heard; but all old Harrovians of his time will be able to set the music of his silken voice to my libretto.

There was in "Skipper" Holme's house a lad of the name of Beatty. At the age of eighteen, and when passing his last term at Harrow he became reckless, and used not only to break bounds, but actually to venture within the portals of public houses, there to acquire and consume *beer*, a heinous offence indeed! One day he was caught *flagrante delicto*, by no less a personage than the venerable and white-bearded Rev. Thomas Steele, who, of course, "sent him up." The head-master was shocked. "You are a great big boy, Beatty," he murmured sorrowfully, "and you are high in the School. As a rule, it irks me to inflict corporal punishment on such; but your offence is rank, and I can conceive no lesser punishment that would meet your case: therefore, oh, Beatty, I must request you to meet me in the Fourth Form Room forthwith."

When they met on the fateful spot, Butler spoke again:

"And now, Beatty, I neglected to inquire of you—who sent you up?"

"Why, that x. y. z. (awful and abominably coarse swear words) old fool, Tommy Steele, and I'll see him and you to H—— before I take a licking—so there!"

The good "Head" was thunderstruck! For a few moments he was too paralysed and scandalized to speak. At last he drew himself up and with a majestic wave of the hand uttered this short but priceless speech:

"Oh!!! Go far—far away—HORRIBLE BEATTY!!!"

And Beatty went.

But his name has been ever treasured in the archives of Harrow. He has even been canonized, and is recalled as *St. Beatty!*

A friend of mine, bringing his son to the head-master's house, told me that Butler had thus addressed the new boy:

"Lit-tel boy, you must be prepared to meet with the rough as well as the smooth; but you must bear yourself meekly and reverently towards your schoolfellows, especially if they are older and stronger than yourself. I remember when I first went to school, a great big bully of a boy produced a sharp pen-knife, which he drove into a certain tender portion of my anatomy, exclaiming, 'Take that, you lit-tel . . . —*something!*'"

Eventually Dr. Theobald Butler was appointed Master of Trinity College, Cambridge. This was shortly after I had gone down.

A certain Indian potentate, who had come to Alma Mater and Trinity College for the ostensible purpose of acquiring scholastic distinction, allowed his ambitious activities to wander in another and less reputable direction—to wit, an undue admiration for such of the opposite sex, who, for a consideration, were willing to encourage his amorous gymnastics.

Unfortunately for the dusky philanderer, the matter became a public scandal, so he was invited to interview the Master, who, after reciting a compendium of the backslider's offences, ended his discourse with:

"*Go far back to the Gorgeous East—lascivious oriental!*"

Stet Fortuno Domus!

When at Harrow I would gaze out of my bed-sitting-room window across the Weald, to where my beloved home Moat Mount stood high upon the horizon, about six miles distant as the crow flies, but quite nine as that villainous and odoriferous bird would hop. I would, in spirit, find myself in the family circle at late dinner, with The Dads enthroned at the head of the table, The Mums on his right, and other members of the family group ranged around the board. Or I would picture myself, rod or gun in hand, wandering down to the Big Pond, full of hopeful anticipation, or pushing my way through the woodlands in search of such game as I might have the remotest chance of finding. I loved every stick and stone, every tree and every bush in the dear demesne. When the holidays at length came round, and I once more set foot on the sacred soil, I would throw me down and kiss the very grass on the velvety lawn in front of the house in an ecstasy of sheer joy and thanksgiving!

As the end of each term grew near, I would draw up a calendar and scratch out each date as day passed into night, and I sought my fold-up "frowsting crib."

Not that I was unhappy at "The School-on-the-Hill," mark you! Far from it! Indeed, I had a pleasant and fairly easy time there; but Moat Mount was Moat Mount, and I had a super-feline attachment to my home and its inmates and all that it and they meant to me.

Of the holidays, the midsummer vacation appealed to me particularly. Not only was it the longest, but by far the most attractive; for it meant camping out, fishing, shooting, unlimited fruit (for which I have always had an insatiable appetite), and various other good things, sports and adventures. My parents always encouraged me to forgather with contemporary lads. As a smaller boy I was given to solitude, and when my youthful spirit moved me to seek the society of others of my age, I had to fall back on the sons of the soil, as represented by the male offspring of the head-gardener, the farm bailiff, and even on those of subordinate hinds and menials. Of these I was an unchallenged leader, and as such led my contingent into innumerable scrapes, which resulted in the tanning of their several hides, hard and good; whilst I, who ought to have suffered in like fashion, managed to avoid Nemesis, but looked upon the units of my legion as fitting scapegoats, or "whipping boys," to bear the burden of my own iniquities.

This association engendered somewhat socialistic theories in my youthful brain; whereat The Dads grieved sorely, since he was a Tory of the old-fashioned, uncompromising sort

But whilst I was at Harrow my politics underwent considerable modification. The tendency of the school, taken as a whole, was decidedly Conservative. When I came to mix with other boys of equality in social status, I began, rather snobbishly perhaps, to look down upon my erstwhile boon companions and to perceive in them a lack of culture and understanding, and an uncouthness of manner and of speech, which had not struck me at the time I was marshalling them for deeds of daring and of mischief.

During the holidays some lad of my own standing and about my own age—generally one of my cousins of the Gill ilk—Crandon or Edward—was asked to Moat Mount to keep me company. Ted Jaquet was some three years younger than myself, and three years is a considerable hiatus in seniority when boys are in their middle "teens." At that time I looked upon Ted of the Jaquets as "a mere kid," though as time went on he seemed to level up, and we became inseparable pals, and so we remained for more than three decades. Then circumstances caused a friendly cleavage; but to the last he remained the dear, delightful, helpful and jovial pal, welded to my heart with bonds of sterling gold. Ted of the Gills was, therefore, at that particular phase of my existence which I am now dealing with, my special favourite, and a right good time we had of it together in the woods and far-spreading lands of Moat Mount. It was our custom, in the summer holidays, to procure a bat-wing tent and camp out in the park. It was a point of honour with us, not to partake of any meal in the house except late dinner, such exception being granted, because it was our pleasure to listen to the words of wit and wisdom which fell from the lips of The Dads; but Ted went very near to forfeiting the old dear's goodwill altogether, owing to a piece of tactless greediness on the younger Edward's part. (The Dads' Christian name was also Edward, be it understood.)

You must know that my beloved parent had a marked partiality for baked apple dumplings. Our archaic cook Mary, who had known him and nursed him as a child, was ever mindful of this gastronomic *penchant*, so that "the jockeys" were very often in evidence. She would provide exactly enough to go round, plus *an extra one for The Dads'* second offensive, which he invariably launched.

This was, I thought, an understood thing; but one evening Edward the Younger so far forgot what was due to his host, so immeasurably his elder and better, as actually to *race The Dads* for the extra dumpling, and, what is more, he "went near to annexing the stakes" (as we say in racing), but the "objection" signal was hoisted.

The one remaining dumpling—a very plethoric and inviting specimen of its kind—reclined on the dish in solitary grandeur.

"Another dumpling please, Uncle Edward," pleaded his youthful namesake, handing his plate.

The Dads was very nearly "rushed." Indeed, he took the desirable confection in the tablespoon, and moved to comply with the request of this unconscionable "Oliver." Then he paused, took the bit (no, *not* the *dumpling*, of course !) in his mouth, so to speak, and settled the question. Transferring the prize in dispute to his own plate with a determined flop, he exclaimed calmly but decisively :

"*No! I'm damned if I do!*"

"Edward the Younger" disqualified ! Race awarded to The Dads !

But for all other meals we decided to be our own caterers, so had to rely on what we could shoot with the gun, or catch with the rod, plus eggs of moor-fowl, coots, or what-not (barring, of course, those of pheasants or partridges), that we could find, or the layings of the domestic barn-door fowls which we were able to purloin from the farm-yard. Fruit and vegetables were obtained by constant raids on the kitchen-garden, and we had the audacity to milk the docile cows as they browsed in the meadows.

We built us a field-kitchen of our own. It was certainly of a somewhat primitive design, but, all things considered, we managed to turn out really Lucullian repasts, to which we occasionally deigned to invite the poor dwellers under the paternal roof. Sometimes, after dinner, The Dads himself would come to our camp, and, seating himself, with the glowing embers lighting up his highly intellectual features, discourse of interesting Nature studies, or psychological mysteries, whilst we listened open-mouthed, what time the owls flitted in ghostly silence overhead, and then alighting on an adjacent tree, hooted lugubriously. Suddenly, The Dads would turn from grave to gay, and rejoice us with flashes of his ready wit and humour, tales of his own boyhood, or his experiences at the Bar and on the Bench. *Eheu fugaces!*

It was whilst thus leading a primitive and fairly innocent life that I had one of the finest bits of carp-fishing that has ever come my way.

Ted was no adept at the art of the angle, so this department was left exclusively to me.

I was well aware that the bit of water, known to our family as " The Big Pond," but charted on the ordnance map as the " Leg-of-Mutton Pond " (owing to its shape), held very fine carp ; but catching them by ordinary means was quite out of the question.

I had seen a score of them—fine, fat fellows of aldermanic proportions—sailing in lethargic fashion close to an islet which studded the centre of the pond, sunning themselves and basking quite close to the surface.

Thought I : " These fellows *must feed* sometimes—perhaps in the early morning. Dashed if I don't have a try ! "

That very evening I punted quietly over to the island, landing on the side remote from that on which I had so often spotted the carp, and, crossing over it, I threw in a goodly ration of ground-bait, consisting of bran, soaked bread and boiled potatoes. Then I retreated.

The next morning I was up at six o'clock (no " Summer Time " in those days—genuine six o'clock a.m. !). Leaving Ted with his expansive mouth wide open, and giving voice to strangulated rasps and gurgles, I picked up my nine-foot bottom rod, ready mounted and equipped for the purpose toward, and slipped down to the pond and into the punt, which I quietly paddled to the island, and then, with stealthy tread, approached my baited swim.

> " The white mist, herald of a golden morn,
> Sweeps from the waters, on whose placid face
> The swallow wantons with her mirrored self,
> And sombre grey, to tender blue gives place.
> The wandering rays of yonder rising sun,
> With diamond scintillations deck the grass,
> And passing o'er the beads of glittering dew,
> Absorb the grateful moisture as they pass."

Such were the conditions, when cautiously I dropped my hook, baited with bread-paste, over the spot where I had cast my ground bait the previous evening, when also I had carefully plumbed the depth and set my tiny cork float accordingly. It now cocked beautifully. *Anticipation* was in evidence. *Agitation* not unexpected. *Realization* hoped for! Happily the three emotions materialized. First there was a gentle oscillation of the cork, which sent little fairy rings radiating from its circumference. Then it curtseyed slightly.

"Those confounded little rudd," I thought. (There were hundreds of them and baby perch in the pond). "They will have my bait off before ever a carp has a chance to grab it!"

But now the float dipped decidedly, but sedately, until only the quill at its top remained out of water. Then it began to sail majestically out and away from the bank.

No rudd this!

I had had sufficient experience of carp bites to sense the real thing. My heart thumped as I struck!

Yes, there was a dour resistance presaging a mighty rush. The reel screeched as the line was torn off it.

The first run of a heavy carp is something to remember. It is no good trying to stop it, or to put on a gentle, ever-increasing pressure as one can with a salmon. A carp must be allowed to go right to the end of its sprint, before any attempt is made to curb its impetuosity. After that, control may, or may not, be successfully attempted.

On this occasion I triumphed, and had the satisfaction of netting a golden beauty of nine pounds. What is more, I accounted for *eight others* before the fish gave up feeding. But the first was the "daddy" of the bunch; the next biggest being five and a half pounds and the smallest three pounds. The average four and a quarter pounds. These were not really big carp, as carp go, having regard to the twenty-pounders and upwards that we hear of from Cheshunt and various other quarters; but they gave me splendid sport for nearly two hours and filled me with an exceeding great joy.

I killed only one of these fish, just to see what it tasted like (it was decidedly muddy in flavour); the rest I placed in the well of the punt as I caught them, and when opportunity afforded, transferred to the Barton Pond, near the house, where, to this day, they may be seen enjoying their sun bath when climatic conditions are favourable. In forty years my big fellow, whom I know as "Goliath," has grown surely, if exceeding slowly. He must now weigh close on the standard twenty pounds pattern. Year after year I have had a hunch to re-take and examine some of these jokers, but somehow or other I have continually missed my opportunities early in the season; whilst later on, the whole pond is choked with weeds and you can only just see the great yellow leather mouths and leaden-hued heads of the carp as they suck in air between the fronds. But I will pull one of the devils out yet! You see if I don't!

Some three miles distant from Moat Mount lies the village of Edgware, celebrated for its profusion of pubs. They seem to alternate persistently with the shops or private dwellings, "pub—shop, pub—cottage, pub—office and so forth. I am reminded incidentally of the banquets I used to enjoy in Bosnia, provided in my honour and that of my colleague, as representatives of Great Britain at the great Sporting Congress at Ibidje. Every repast began and ended with beer, with beer between each course and as a topping to each of the various vintages which were handed round.

At the western end of this same village of Edgware, lies the fine old mansion and estate known as Canon's Park. When I and my cronies were lads, Canon's was in the possession of an aged dame of Scottish descent, Mrs. Begg by name, who, very graciously gave us boys permission to fish in the "Great Lake" and the various ponds in the park. This was a privilege which we thoroughly appreciated, I assure you. It was always an exuberant joy to drive from home to El Dorado. We would pull up at the "Round Pond," which lay nearest the gates, and prepare our rods and tackle, whilst Wilson, our coachman, would drive on to the mansion, to obtain the necessary permit for the day. The owner was punctilious about this, and would never grant *general permission*; but I do not remember any occasion on which a refusal was forthcoming; nevertheless, I can vouch for it that we were always obsessed with needless anxiety until Wilson and the wagonette re-appeared, bearing the good graces of our patroness. Then happy relief would reign supreme and we would set to work with a will.

Oh, those were joyous days for enthusiastic young anglers. Let me recount a typical one.

The said Round Pond swarmed with fish of sorts. The rudd and roach were of fair size and possessed of voracious appetites; also they were pleasantly unsophisticated. There were possibilities of big tench and perch, but we liked to start *catching fish* right away, as an augury for a real good day, so, on the occasion with which I am dealing, we began nicking the rosy-finned rudd and ruby-eyed roach in masterly fashion. Getting tired of this diversion, I wandered off to certain holes, where I thought tench might be lurking. Having found a swim to my liking I substituted the tail of a well-scoured lob for the bread-paste which had proved so effective with the lesser denizens of the pond. Hardly had the bait time to sink when it was violently seized. My float shot away under water and yards of my line were dragged out. A perch, of course! I gave him time, and then struck, but his size proved to be in *inverse ratio* to his energy. He was barely half-a-pound. I soon had three others of the same quality, and then there was a marked variation in the phenomena of the next " bite." For the float, instead of shooting off and under on the slant, now bobbed serenely two or three times, before submerging sedately and vertically.

I knew what that portended, so was not surprised when my strike encountered a very solid resistance. A tench, sure —and a big fellow to boot. I yelled to Edward of the Gills, who was still busy with the smaller fish the other side of the pond. He dropped his rod and sprinted around smartly enough.

" Here, you ass," I cried, as he arrived panting. " You've forgotten the net! Hook it off and get it—look lively—this is a beauty!"

" Oh, net be blowed," my cousin answered rudely. " I can scoop him out with my hands, if you will drag him in to the bank."

I had my doubts, but the fish was now beat and rolling on the top of the water, so I did as asked.

Ted began fumbling with the tench, but at last managed to raise it from the water.

" Chuck him out, and on to the bank," I shouted.

The effort was made, but the fish gave a despairing squirm and slithered out of Ted's hands, falling back on the surface with a resounding flop, and incidentally breaking my line just above the hook, thus freeing itself. It lay still on the surface for a moment, waving its great, black fins. I dashed into the water, knee-deep, in hope of retrieving it, but just as I was about to clutch it, the tench rolled over and sailed away slowly into the depths from whence it had come. I was furious and had the wind fairly up, for this desirable fish was a three-pounder at least !

" You rotter ! " I shouted to my cousin witheringly. " What the devil made you drop it ? Why on earth didn't you fetch the net when I told you ? How did you hope to lift a big tench with your mutton fists ? "

" I couldn't help it, old sport. The dashed thing was as slippery as an eel ; but what does it matter, there are plenty more where that ugly brute came from ! "

This was altogether too much. I scrambled out, wet and muddy and strode up to the offender. I am afraid I conjured up my whole store of sultry anathemas and voiced them to the astonished Edward.

He stood it for a time, and then, all of a sudden, his own choler rose in revolt.

" Shut up ! " he yelled. " Confound you and your slimy tench. Here, get back into the pond and fetch him out if you want him."

With this he gave me a shove which sent me to the very brink of the pond again. The war clouds were gathering, and it looked as if serious issue would be joined, but, happily, there was a diversion in the shape of Mrs. Begg's red-headed and colossal nephew and heir, Charlie Forbes, who came up and wanted to know what all the rumpus was about, and whether we had leave to fish his aunt's waters. Having assured him that such was indeed the case, we simmered down, but the loss of that particularly fine tench oppressed me for months and will be held in regretful memory until the end of all things.

Next, we tried a long, river-like bit of water which stretched between the Round Pond and the " Great Lake " and here, among other fish of various kinds, I landed two brace of specimens, which rather puzzled me to identify. Afterwards I discovered that they were *carp-bream.* (Even now I am not sure whether these fish are a distinct species, or are really hybrids between carp and bream. Certainly they have marked characteristics of both. It is said that they are to be caught only in the counties of Middlesex, Herts and Bucks.)

These four which now came to net were much of a size, about one pound each. In later days I had a round-dozen between two and three pounds from a private pond near Watford.

Whilst I was exploiting these strange fishes, Ted got going with a school of fair-sized perch.

We gave the Big Lake the go-by because it had been drained off and left dry the preceding winter and we had been given to understand that it had not been re-stocked. So we made our way to a small bit of water near the mansion which, so one of the farmhands informed us, held some " big 'uns." But our informant failed to specify what manner of fish they were.

The edges of this pond were very shallow and rush grown, but far out there seemed to be a deep, clear hole, in the middle of which was a miniature island.

I baited with lob and cast well out into this open space; nor had I long to wait for a response, since my float had hardly cocked before it was drawn completely out of sight, whilst my line was dragged quickly along the surface.

When I thought that the psychological moment had arrived, I struck and found myself fast in something really heavy, which played deep and refused to show for quite ten minutes.

This time, profiting by experience, Ted devoted himself to serious business. Tucking up his " bags " he waded through the shallows to the edge of the deep and soon had our victim safe in the net. It proved to be a magnificent perch of three-and-a-quarter pounds! Good egg!

I began to have visions of a basket of similar beauties, so set to work again with hope blazing boldly in my bosom. But never another touch did I have, though I fished on patiently for nearly two hours; whilst Ted was trying in a likely-looking hole on the far side, with an equally barren result. I fished that pond over and over again on subsequent occasions, but never had I the ghost of a bite, so I have come to the conclusion that the ponderous bulk of this perch had resulted from his cannibalistic practices on what other fish had originally shared the water with him, and that at last he had remained monarch of all he surveyed, but rationless, hence the prompt avidity with which he had seized my worm as soon as presented. But if half-starved, he certainly did not look it, for a handsomer or better-conditioned specimen of his tribe it would be hard to imagine.

It was now time to wend our way to the Round Pond again, where Wilson was to pick us up with the wagonette.

We passed along the banks of the Big Lake on our way, where I gazed with longing eyes at the mallard, tufted duck and pochards which were in evidence. Passing a bed of round-reeds, I noticed that they were being violently agitated, whilst here and there big ripples showed where undoubtedly fish of some sort were moving.

" Hullo, Ted," I exclaimed, " Dashed if they haven't re-stocked the lake again, and here have we been thinking it fishless. We must be after these jokers next time we get a permit."

" Edward of the Gills " concurred.

And so it came to pass that I wrote to good Mrs. Begg for leave for a particular day, some fortnight later.

On the preceding night Ted and I went over and dropped a dose of ground bait, consisting of brewers' grain, greaves, bread, bran and boiled potatoes in two likely-looking swims.

The next morning saw us mounting our tackle betimes.

The depth was not great and there was something in the liveliness of the water which told of the presence of fish—many of them! I bent on two medium hooks, the one baited with worm, the other with bread paste. We had plumbed the depth the previous evening.

No sooner were our floats in action than they became lively.

At once I was playing what I supposed was a single fish, but found I had one on each hook. I failed to net them both, but the one I did land was a carp of about three-quarters of a pound.

Almost at the same moment Ted had one which might have been the twin brother of my victim.

The fun, such as it was, was fast and furious. No waiting here. As soon as ever our baits sank, they were seized, and so the battle waged until we had two score of these carplets to our credit. Each were the counterpart of the other. The same weight, and the same condition, which was good and healthy. There was a little pool handy in which we placed our captives. We borrowed a sack from the Canon's bailiff, and when our trap came to take us home, we netted out the fish and inserted them therein, packed with wet grass. This kept them alive until we reached Moat Mount, where we immediately released them in a little bit of ornamental water in the garden known as The Basin Pond. And here they remained for years. They were regularly fed and became tame enough to eat out of our hands, but they never grew much, indeed, few of them ever exceeded a pound in weight. Now had they been Prussian carp this would not be strange, but, as a matter of fact, they were true Britishers.

On making inquiries, I found that *no fish had been placed in the Canon's lake* to the knowledge of any of the " quality " or employees. When the water was drained, some whopping carp had been taken out, also tons of fine tench and some specimen perch ; but none of these were returned. Where, then, did these small, even-sized carp come from ? There were thousands in the lake. How did they " happen " ?

Some ten years later the same problem was presented by the Big Pond at Moat Mount. It had become foul and silted, so the water was drained off in July and the fish removed to other waters. The mud and clay were scooped out to the depth of at least three feet and then the basin was left fallow until the following November, when it was allowed to refill by help of the autumnal rains.

No fish of any kind were returned to the water, as Irwin had an idea of stocking with two-year-old trout in the following February, but for some reason or other this was not done.

In the month of May I happened to notice movements in the water such as I had observed at Canon's. I felt sure that fish of some sort were in the water, so I fetched my rod, and, baiting with brandling worm, set to work. History repeated itself, for I was kept busy from the very start. This time the mysterious fish proved to be tench, averaging about three to the two pounds, and all of practically the same weight.

I took twenty-seven of them and the next day a visitor had forty! And yet, only six months had passed since the pond was as dry as a turnpike road!

What about it?

"Oh!" say some, "the tench must have lain snug in the mud until the pond refilled!"

It won't do! There was no mud. There was not even clay. Besides, tench have not the pulmonary advantages of the cerodotus!

"Someone must have introduced them without your knowledge," say others.

Not on your life! Fancy anyone taking the trouble to procure some ten dozen three-quarter pound tench and surreptitiously introducing them to private waters just for the fun of the thing! Go to!—otherwise—Rats!

No, the sanest theory which I can advance, is that wild fowl convey the spawn of fish to virgin waters on their feet or plumage. Or, what is still more likely, devour spawn, which passes through without being sterilized. But such being admitted, for the sake of argument, it is still a brain-racking puzzle to conceive how fish thus propagated could *possibly attain a weight of three-quarters of a pound in six months!* I give it up!

It is a remarkable thing, too, that tench never previously throve in the Big Pond. I introduced many, but not a single one was ever seen or caught again, and when the pond was drained devil a tench was in evidence.

What is more, after about sixty of these mysterious newcomers had been landed by various anglers, there was a sudden cessation, and from that day to this (on which I write) not a tench has been caught, seen, or heard of in the Big Pond of Moat Mount! They had just *happened* and they just *were not!*

That is all there is to it.

But the ultra-rapid growth of fish under certain favourable circumstances has been strikingly borne home to me on several occasions. Here is a case in point.

Some few years after the Big Pond had been drained off as described, a like method of clearance was resorted to as regards the Barton. Similarly, the bed was left dry for some months, but the pond was at last replenished by " February Fill Dyke."

In May, the water swarmed with diminutive rudd and roach fry. (How they came there goodness only knows!)

Now the Big Pond was over-stocked with perch of the microbian order, such as never increased in length or bulk by one jot or tittle. It was easy enough to catch them for they would fight and hustle for a particle of worm on a small hook, before it could sink to its proper level.

Two dozen of these liliputian fishes I transferred to the Barton Pond, where forthwith they set to work gorging themselves at the expense of the luckless fry, and had the time of their lives!

By October these same fry were utterly exterminated and I determined to see how the perchlets which I had introduced had fared meanwhile, so I made an attack with worm.

Success was instantaneous and I landed seven fish weighing *close on three-quarters of a pound each!* Fine, sportive fellows, in excellent condition, with deeply-coloured stripes and fins, and opalescent gills.

These I returned to their native element, figuring that in another year, at their present rate of progression and development, I might find myself fighting with Brobdingnagian specimens.

But oh, dear no! Now that the supply of cannibalistic provender had failed, these voracious hooligans refused to grow an ounce heavier; moreover, as soon as the last of them paid forfeit, their numerous progeny reverted to the two-inch scale, and so remain to this day. Whereby and wherefore I have come to the conclusion that the average size of any kind of fish, in any water, depends *entirely* upon the normal supply and quality of the food which such water is able to provide.

When the Christmas holidays came round the gun reigned supreme, for my angling efforts had not risen to winter fishing. The leviathan pike was beyond my dreams then, nor have I ever enjoyed one of those gala days with *Esox-lucius*, when fishing in ice-rimmed waters, wonderful specimen of twenty to thirty pounds are often accounted for. In fact, I may at once confess that a paltry fifteen-pound pike is the best of its ilk that I have ever claimed for my own.

I have already stated that the show of game on the home estate was of a very modest description, even at the commencement of the season. By the time December was ushered in there was practically nothing to shoot at in the way of legitimate game, so we had to fall back upon very small "deer," such as blackbirds, thrushes (common or garden and missel), fieldfares and red-wings. The two last-named were fair game, and enthusiastically welcomed in any numbers by old Mary, our "Zummerzetzheer" cook, who served them up in many appetizing and dainty ways. Personally, I preferred them plain roast and stuffed tight with bread and butter crumbs, to which just a *soupçon* of onion had been added. Believe me, sirs, a fat missel thrush or fieldfare is something to smack the lips over, cooked and served in the fashion described.

In my boyhood's days the grass lands which lay to the north-west of the Metropolis were a favourite resort of the Scandinavian *turdi*. When conditions were favourable, large flocks could be seen scattered over the pastures, busy gathering their daily rations of earthworms, leather-jackets, wireworms and other obscene creatures. Wherefore, these birds might be accounted real good friends to the farmer; but I sorrowfully admit that this did not save them from our murderous raids on their flocks. It was only when a hard frost rendered their food supply more than problematical that we had any chance of bringing them into action during the day-time. In open weather they had ever an alert eye to mark our stealthy approach.

We got our own back, however, when roosting time arrived. The two principal coverts on the property were named respectively, " Scratch " and " Barnet " woods. The former, by far the larger, covering some forty acres ; but both were frequented by vast numbers of fieldfares and redwings, seeking a peaceful night's repose, but often meeting with a dose of lead pills, which must have dissipated any idea they may have had of such a happy consummation. By the " droppings," we were able to determine the best posts to take up, and so distribute our forces, that the luckless birds, when harried from one resting place, would seek another, only to find an equally uncongenial reception.

These excursions were indulged in by all (The Dads as keen as any), and each *shot his birds sitting* as they came in an almost continuous stream from sunset to dark, persistently perching in certain bare trees. The purist Harry, who severely condemned this method as not being " cricket," would take position *outside* the wood, where he made some pretty practice at the fieldfares and redwings, which, after circling round several times, would swoop down at a high rate of velocity. One evening he induced me to try this form of practice. I found it so exhilarating that I gave up the less sportsmanlike but rather more exciting method of obtaining a bag.

Yes, exciting ! You have no idea of the thrill experienced when waiting for the flocks to settle with loud " chack-chacks." The breathless stalking from tree to tree, until one could be pretty sure of pinking one's bird ; then the satisfaction of hearing it hit the ground ; the thrusting through the dense undergrowth and groping in the semi-darkness, until—with luck—one's hands touched feather !

One evening I had the good fortune to be posted near a high beech, which topped all the surrounding trees. Here the fieldfares came in a continuous stream. I was using cartridges loaded with a reduced charge of black powder and Number 8 shot, *pro rata.* The birds came one by one to a particular branch on the tree-top, and one by one I dropped them, until I had two dozen and one to my credit (perhaps I ought to say *dis*credit—what ?). Then I ran out of ammunition, and by the time I had replenished my store from that of brother Irwin, who was on duty at the adjacent post, and who had hardly had a shot all the evening, the flight was over.

There came a time when The Dads was able to secure the sporting rights over the Canon's Park Estate from Mrs. Begg, and here, in the season, we had some very decent partridge shooting over dogs. It was not unusual for a party of four of us to account for between twenty and thirty brace of birds and half-a-dozen hares in one day's shoot.

But what intrigued me the more seriously were the wild duck which I had located during my several angling visits. I was dead keen on duck, and always have been. I thought the matter out, and persuaded The Dads and Irwin to have a go.

My tactics entailed the setting forth, in Cimmerian darkness, of the cutting-out expedition, during the small hours of a bitter January morning.

Each unit of our contingent was to take up a well-concealed position near the several reed beds, where the *canards sauvages* were known to seek slumber, and there await the first faint promise of a hopeful dawn, when the "savage" ones, so I imagined, would awaken and begin flighting to and fro.

This was a sound scheme theoretically, but in practice it did not pan out particularly well, because The Dads, who was somewhat purblind in subdued lights, let off at a vagrant carrion crow—thinking it was a mallard—just as a chorus of quackings announced that the fun was likely to begin. This premature and ill-considered explosion caused an awful turmoil. The duck rose in clouds, with loud lamentations and splashings, and flew aimlessly in all directions. The light was still very feeble, and it was hard to cover one's bird effectively.

However, I had half a dozen shots, and following two of these, I had the satisfaction of hearing loud "plops" on the water, denoting the impact of a plump body on its surface. Both these victims proved to be fine drake-mallard, which, when retrieved by Irwin's pet bitch Rose, I handled with intense satisfaction. My brother accounted for another brace, one of which was a red-headed pochard; whilst The Dads, having missed the crow, could produce nothing better than an old "moll'ern" (heron), which had confidingly flopped over my parent's head, a moorhen and a water-vole. Anyway, a mixed bag.

When it is considered that Canon's Park is but little over seven miles distant from Hyde Park Corner, one may well marvel at such a good show of game as was here to be found. I have mentioned that hares were fairy numerous on this fine estate. So when, later on, I got together my (very) scratch pack of foot beagles at Moat Mount, I lost no time in taking them over to Canon's. What is more, we soon "found" in the park, and had a rare barney. My little "beauties" (?) who had had a series of blank days at home, now threw their tongues joyously, and "chowked" about all over the shop—quite out of my control—for I had no whipper-in. Presently there were *three* hares afoot at once within the ringed fence. The beagles changed from one to another, and pandemonium reigned. But one division, consisting of about five and a half couples, somehow glued themselves on to the line of a huge tabby tom-cat, probably because grimalkin's scent did not call for such careful and intense nosing out as that of their legitimate quarry. Anyhow, "pussy" went off hot foot, making straight for the back-yard of the mansion itself, with the "brave beagle boys" running from scent to view, and legging it for all they were worth. When the haven was reached, there was a devil of a rumpus. Mrs. Begg's prize poultry broke barracks and flew clucking and squawking in all directions, with the varlets and scullions cursing and swearing, kicking and hitting right and left. Then their mistress's fat but beloved prize pug had an epileptic fit and nearly paid in his checks!

Luckily, good Mrs. Begg was absent that day, but you may be sure that a highly-coloured description of the fiasco was conveyed to her by her menials, though, goodness knows, the episode was lurid enough, even when not exaggerated.

Anyway, it put "paid" to our further activities at Canon's. We were all "warned off" for life! Of course, I "got the bird," as the saying goes! I have dealt with these blessed beagles of mine elsewhere. They were destined to get me into further trouble as related in an earlier book of my reminiscences. In later years Canon's passed into the possession of my club-friend, Sir Arthur Du Cros. He had the Great Lake drained and all the coarse fish removed (I am told there were three tons of enormous carp and tench among other species), with a view to stocking it with trout. Some ill-advised friend persuaded him to introduce "rainbows," with the usual and inevitable consequence that, in a year's time, they had entirely disappeared.

Then I offered to go into the matter thoroughly, guaranteeing that the lake should become a perfect paradise for the angler.

Of course, my plan was the stocking with three and two-year-old *brown trout*, seeing to it that a plentiful supply of snails, leeches, minnows and *nymphidæ* was kept up.

At first Sir Arthur concurred, but business took him out of England, so I had no opportunity of conferring with him personally. Meanwhile I had made a careful investigation of the water, but quite failed to ascertain that there were fish of any kind therein, though I did not try with my rod.

When Sir Arthur returned, he informed me that it was not his intention to retain possession of Canon's Park.

So that was that !

After my beloved father's death, my brother Irwin became tenant for life of Moat Mount, and so he remained until his death, September, 1922. Immediately he came into possession, he set about game-preserving in orthodox and quite liberal fashion. He employed experienced keepers and raised a large head of pheasants. The rabbits increased and multiplied in surprising fashion, until at last they became pestiferous, and then the unanswered question was how to keep them down ?

Where, in the old days we would account for half a dozen bunnies in a day, we now could count our tally in figures of hundreds, with long rows of pheasants laid out in gorgeous array.

These shoots became very formal affairs, and when brother Irwin invited me to join in, as was his custom so to do, I became, like a convict, a *mere number !*

It was no longer: " Look out, Cockie, a rabbit coming your way!" but " Mark over No. 3" (or whatever my number might chance to be).

Plenty to shoot at, good sirs, and a nice hot luncheon in the interim to batten on. But oh! for the days with Toby, Cato or Cockie (according to the era of operations), and one tried and trusted pal, working hard all day for half a dozen rabbits, a possible pheasant, partridge or woodcock, and an assortment of pigeons, fieldfares and redwings!

Once again—*Eheu fugaces!*

When bent on the more formal gatherings at Moat Mount, after poor old Irwin had suffered a breakdown, which necessitated the laying aside of his beloved gun, I generally motored down from town with my distinguished relative, Air-Marshal Sir Hugh (" Boom ") Trenchard (a very keen and skilful shot), or Capt. Gerald Rivington, an A1 exponent of the shooters' Art. I think the former was far more upset about a rocketter or a woodcock missed (and regretted the " wash-out " far more deeply) than by the undoing of his wonderful and meticulous plans for raiding Berlin with his air forces, by reason of the intervention of the Great Armistice of November 11th, 1918.

CHAPTER VII

I WAS eighteen years of age when I left Harrow. My parents considered that I was a trifle too young to go up to the Varsity straight away, so made arrangements for private tuition with my godfather, Canon Harding Girdlestone of Gloucester. He was head of the Theological College in that ancient city, and occupied a house in Dean's Yard. The Girdlestones had a fair quiverful of offspring—five girls: Mary ("Mynie"), Josephine ("Black Joe"), Lucy, Florie and Maudie, and one son, Theophilus, who was the youngest but two of the bunch. Mynie was then just of age. Of course I fell in love with, and proposed to, her, but was deservedly snubbed for my pains; whereupon—giving Black Joe the go-by—I transferred my affections to Lucy. But she was already enamoured of one of the students, one Charlie Stook, lately down from Clare, Cambridge. Instead of bearing jealous enmity I took a great liking to this lad. He did not seem to me to be altogether cut out for a clerical life, but that was the way with most of his fellow students. They seemed to be very busy enjoying life; on the "make hay while the sun shines" principle, I suppose!

Little Maudie was the beauty of the family, but since she was then only twelve years of age she was not on my map as a prospective bride, though I made a note of her for future reference. Truly, some hobbledehoys have a colossal cheek!

But all of the household were very kind and indulgent to me; whilst my good godfather spared no pains to cram me with sufficient book learning to ensure my passing the Trinity College (Cambridge) Matriculation.

My great regret was that there was no sport to be had round about Gloucester—not even reasonable rat hunting. The local gun-maker informed me that snipe were often to be found on the flats of the Severn, so I made several expeditions with the youthful Theo in attendance; but devil a snipe or any other considerable bird—or beast, either, for the matter of that—did I see. But one day I stood on the ditch in awed astonishment and excitement, watching the first horse race that ever came within my ken. I went home carrying the deadly infection with me.

Otherwise my leisure hours were spent in poring over novels of a sporting or amorous nature, and in the evenings attending the theatre, where I saw so many bad plays that —imagining I could write better—I wasted much ink and paper in the endeavour, and actually had the effrontery to send the libretto of one of my feeble efforts to Messrs. David James and Thomas Thorne, who, at that time, presided over the fortunes of the Vaudeville Theatre. It goes to the credit of their kind hearts that, instead of consigning my ridiculous script to the waste paper basket, they expended a twopenny stamp in order to return it to its author. Moreover, they enclosed a short note thanking him "*for allowing them to see it.*"

Then I bethought me of a kind of classic revue, founded on Homer's "Illiad" which should be enacted in the "Theatre Royal Back Drawing Room," when Christmas time should arrive; but as its producer required the Girdlestone girls to wear tights, his ambitious play was promptly banned by the parental censors. So that was that!

But as Spring came round Charlie Stook, who had occupied second thwart in the Clare II. boat, bethought him to get together a four that should disport itself on the local stretch of the Severn, which at that point was both narrow and tortuous.

Being a light weight (about 8. 4.) I was inveigled into acting as cox. I took to it as a duck to water, and what I learnt under Charlie's tuition stood me in good stead when I became a Member of the First Trinity Boat Club.

Now that I have reached this point I may as well go ahead and deal with what befel me during my varsity career, for there is not much more to be said about my sojourn under my godfather's roof.

I passed the matriculation quite easily. Here I may perhaps be allowed to " buck "—that I have never been " spun " in an examination, though I had a precious narrow squeak when I came before Dr. Butler for the Harrow entrance exam. as already set forth.

I went up to Trinity for the Michaelmas term a year after I had shaken the dust of the school on the Hill from my shoes.

My first idea was to follow up my experience as a rifle shot, and to attempt to work my way into the Varsity Eight. Accordingly I joined the corps; but hardly had I done so, when I was pounced upon by some of the " wet bobs," who, noting my diminutive proportions, thought I might prove a valuable asset to the I.T.B.C. as coxswain.

I was in the position of the proverbial ass, steering between two bundles of hay, but I came to the conclusion that the river, and not the range, was the place for me. I did not relish the idea of recruits' drill and other disciplinary amenities. My experience with the theological four had whetted my appetite for steering. Moreover, I was wise to the fact that if discipline were to be the order of the day, your Uncle Cockie was the one *to impose*, not to *suffer* it! A " Cox " has, or should have, plenary powers.

My first venture was the steering of one of the Harrovian scratch fours. Here I was among old schoolfellows, and it was my luck to draw a pretty useful quartette of oarsmen.

What is more, my little lot won the final in great style, so I found myself the proud possessor of a double-handled and lacquered pewter mug, with the names of the victorious crew neatly engraved thereon, beneath the well-known Harrow School arms.

When the Lent races came round I was allocated to the Club Fifth boat, which held an inglorious position—fourth in the Third Division.

Meanwhile I had put on some weight, and was now close on nine stone, which at that time was considered over heavy for a coxswain.

The other captains, in order of seniority, if they were not already suited with seniors, had had the pick of the freshmen to handle their lines. They had gone for the lightest bits of immature humanity that they could lay hands on, without any respect for natural adaptability to the purpose toward.

Consequently more than one of the clubs' higher boats were encumbered by anæmic and neurasthenic "coxes," who, as might have been foreseen, proved disastrous failures.

It was known that I had had some little experience at the game, so there was no doubt but that, had I been a couple of stone lighter, I should not have been relegated to the lowly Fifth boat.

Now it so happened that an influx of very hefty freshmen had occurred. Booth, who was captain of the Fifth, had a fine eye for good material, however raw, and was a master hand at knocking it into shape and polishing it.

Our stroke was a charming chap, J. T. Penrose by name. Both he and Booth were religionists of the strictest order, but for all that, first class sportsmen and as keen as mustard.

Ours was a heavy, powerful crew, and when it came to the Lent races it became obvious that we were a bit more than useful.

Penrose rowed a long, sweeping stroke, and was well backed up by No. 7 and the rest, so that we were full of beans and hope.

I had noticed how many coxes, during training, had adopted the traditional method of handling the lines; that is to say, they held them *behind their backs*, with the palms of the hand turned upward.

This struck me as a foolish and fatuous thing to do. How, in such fashion, could they possibly exercise that delicacy of control, such as is necessary to edge a racing eight, going full swing, around the acute corners of the Cam?

Another stupid trick they had was to jerk their bodies forward at the finish of the stroke; whereby, I felt convinced, that the way of the boat must be disastrously effected.

Your Uncle Cockie had other ideas. He caused two round pegs to be attached to his "strings," in such a position, that when his elbows were pressed to his side these "holds" were in much the same position as a jockey's hands on the rein would be when racing.

Thereby I was able to make use of that delicacy of "hands" which is of such precious value in so many sporting activities.

When it is said of a horseman that he has "good hands," the term is perfectly well understood by society in general, and by its sporting element in particular. The hand is the executive of the brain; indeed, it may be said that the latter is the strategist and the former the tactician; for in the nicety of balance, the quick and accurative initiative, and the nervous and muscular power which links them, depends the effect which it is desired to produce.

Where this condition of perfect accord exists we have "hands" as understood in sporting parlance. Where other conditions prevail we have only physiological members, which perform their various offices in perfunctory and unsatisfactory fashion; since muscular power only is in the ascendancy, whilst nervous and psychic control is either entirely wanting,—or is of negligible assistance in bringing about the wished-for result.

The possession of "good hands" is an asset of immense importance in a great variety of sporting and other endeavours. Take, for instance, my own case as coxswain of a racing eight. This is a job where "good hands" are of inestimable service. They can only exist when clarity of brain, nervous stability and lightning-like initiative and decision are present. Especially are they valuable when the course is a tortuous one, such as that of the Cam. Watch the performance of the various coxswains as they attempt to negotiate "Grassy Corner" during the May races. You will then understand where "hands" come in. The happy possessor of such will take his angle and slip round the salient, with his rudder only slightly inclined to the stroke side. As the boat answers to his touch, hardly a ripple will be raised, so that the "way" is well maintained, and the craft "straightens out" directly the open stretch is reached.

Now examine the performance of the novice, or one whose "hands" are at a discount. He will "come over" too soon or too late, and then to correct the error, will bring his rudder with a jerk to such an angle that it will throw up a veritable fountain. The boat will lose her pace, and appear almost to stop between the strokes.

It has been said that the difference between good and bad steering round "Grassy Corner" on the Cam, amounts to the gain or loss respectively of from one to one and a half lengths.

It is a remarkable but undoubted fact, that comparatively few professional jockeys have "hands," and that in this respect, the amateur rider makes the better show. It is interesting to watch a large field sweeping past the stands when cantering to the post. You will have no difficulty in spotting "hands"—or the want of them. I have always considered that the snaffle is the excuse for bad hands, and I am good to support that view.

I have ridden horses of all sorts to hounds; from the "blood 'un" to the weight carrying cob, and in summer time have used some of them as cavalry chargers with my Yeomanry. I never had a real crash, and my bones retained their pristine soundness to the end of my hunting career. I do not think anyone could or would accuse me of not riding straight to hounds. That was "hands" again! "Hands" of the moral variety are required for hunting hounds just as they are for controlling bodies of one's fellow men and women, though here the term applied to the natural gift is tact. But the connection is clear. What a deal of trouble, unrest and discontent can be caused by a *tactless* officer in dealing with all beneath him in rank. *Per contra* how pleasant and smooth military service may be under one who possesses this most desirable quality.

"The eye follows the brain, and the hand follows the eye," is the elemental instruction of gun and musketry experts. One who has not the advantage of "hands" will never be a dependable shot, whether he be drawing a bead on a figure target or on an advancing Hun, or whether he be swinging on to a driven grouse or partridge, or snapping a quick-rising snipe—he will press the trigger with a nervous jerk which completely upsets the alignment and windage allowances.

The steering of motor cars and boats, launches, yachts and larger craft also requires "hands," and in some cases considerable muscular activity. But I should imagine that the one accomplishment above all where "hands" are *sine qua non* is that, which to me is a mystery on which I look with reverential awe and unbounded admiration—the art of the flying pilot in the air. I have no technical knowledge or experience whatever in this direction; but surely I am right in supposing that it is work for "hands" *in excelsis!* Oh, those wonderful boys!

I have never heard it said of an angler that he has "good hands," yet here is a case where undoubtedly such a possession is of inestimable value, whether he is exercising the Waltonian art in its highest form (which he asserts is dry-fly fishing) or whether he is making Herculean casts with a treble gut cast, and a sixteen-feet rod, in an offensive launched against the lordly salmon.

In either case, it is not only the subtlety of the attack which needs "hands"; but if haply the victim has attached itself, they come most insistently into requisition when reducing the struggling fish to that state of sweet reasonableness which makes him amenable to net or gaff.

The "slipper" in the coursing field needs "hands" to deliver his charges smoothly and evenly. Lacking this advantage he is apt to jerk them off their feet and put them out of stride. And what sort of claim to distinction would the aristocratic sportsman of the Four in Hand Club possess unless so gifted? But with "hands" of the right quality and hearts in the right place, the man, the woman and the child need fear neither material nor moral opposition.

These are mere academic generalities. It is time I returned to actualities.

At last the Lent races were toward and the stage was set for a game quite new to me; but one which I had looked forward to with unbounded enthusiasm. So I was in a high state of excitement when I embarked my crew five minutes before gun fire.

We were fourth in the long line of the Third Division. The boat immediately in front of us, if I remember rightly, was Clare II. Magdalene was head of the Division, and I think it was Downing which came next.

I looked to my rudder lines and tested them. All correct!

Booth stood with watch in hand. "Three minutes more! Two minutes! Sixty seconds!"

I gave the word of command.

"Ready? Forward!"

"Thirty seconds, fifteen, ten, five, four, three, two, one. GUN!"

We were away smartly and immediately began to gain on Clare; but they, in their turn, were quickly pegging back Downing.

I was almost within striking distance as we rounded First Post Corner; but before I could make my effort, I saw the arm of the Downing cox go up in token of defeat by Clare.

Immediately I decided on a desperate venture; coming up on the inside of the easied boats (conquerors and conquered) I yelled out to Penrose, "Pick it up, stroke. I'll squeeze by and we'll have a shot at Magdalene."

My gallant crew responded with a will. Magdalene, badly steered, had swung out at Grassy Corner. Here was my opportunity. Despite the obstruction caused by Downing and Clare I managed to manœuvre my craft so that I could slip close round this tricky bend, without making too hard use of my rudder, with the consequence that we gained fully one and a half lengths on the leaders. As we swung round Ditton and into the Long Reach, we were still two clear lengths to the bad; but we continued to gain steadily all up the stretch, and when the nose of our boat was within a quarter of a length of their rudder I called on my men for a final effort. Again they responded magnificently. I was not going to risk a direct shot, but determined to edge on to them obliquely.

"HUP! HUP!! HUP!!! Put it all in. . . . BUMP!"

Up went the arm of the Magdalene cox!

We had bumped over two places with only about two hundred yards to go!

This of course put us at the head of the division. So now we had to get back to the starting point, in order to row as *last boat in the Second Division.*

Our objective was to lower the colours of Lady Margaret II.

Despite the severe race which my chaps had just had, they were quite ready for the fray, and at gun fire hit the water with a hefty punch.

The job proved an easy one, for I made my bump in " The Gut."

Each of the ensuing nights we scored one; whereby we put up the remarkable record *of seven bumps in four nights.* I believe it has never been lowered.

Some crew, believe me!

A propos neurasthenic coxswains, a good story is told of one of the kidney, who, holding his watch in one hand, and the " nut " of the hawser (which holds the boat to the shore until the gun gives the departing signal) in the other, was in a state of unholy terror. He counted " five—four—three —two—one." Then, as the gun spoke, *away went his watch into the river; whilst he stuffed the " nut " into his waistcoat pocket.* Of course, he was pulled out of the boat and got a dreadful drenching; whilst his unfortunate crew had to suffer a bump!

CHAPTER VIII

IT was during my sojourn at Gloucester that I first made acquaintance with " Dardi-moor," sacred to the memory of Uncle Tom Cobley, and his reprehensible associates, Messrs. Will Brewer, Jan Stewer, Peder Guernsey, Peder Davey, David Whiddon, Harry Hawke, and Jan Pearce's unfortunate " old grey mare," as immortalized by that classic ditty which had its origin in Widdicombe-on-the-Moor.

I met our party (consisting of The Dads, Irwin, my brother-in-law (Capt. Harry Edwards) and another of the Gill ilk, Gerald to wit) at Taunton Station, *en route* for the famous moor.

At that time, my own particular canine shadow (I always had one such inseparable companion) was Cockie (known in the Kennel Club register as "Coxswain"). I have already alluded to this highly intelligent and devoted, but somewhat peppery little fox terrier, in another place. I had taught him almost everything that a dog can learn in the way of sport—legitimate and otherwise—and a truly apt pupil he had proved.

The Dads had invested some of the superfluous dross which was derived from his profits on *The Field* newspaper business, in the purchase of several farms on Dartmoor. The why and wherefore of the said investment I have always failed to understand, but my parent was possessed of an uncommon shrewdness and probably had some good and sufficient reasons for supposing that these holdings would, in time, bring a handsome return for his outlay.

We detrained at Moreton Hampstead. Much to my horror my exuberant parent would insist on our *walking* to our destination—seven weary miles across the moor; whilst our impedimenta and commissariat were sent on ahead, by van.

He said it "would stretch our legs" after our long train journey; but I was not keen on "having my leg pulled," either metaphorically or actually, therefore I concealed myself in the transport wagon with Cockie, but was discovered and incontinently thrown out; so we had to make the best of it, and "pad the hoof."

Our temporary residence was to be Lower Cator, one of the farms of which The Dads was now landlord. At this length of time the name of the worthy tenant has escaped me; but he was a typical son of the Devonshire soil, whose uncompromising dialect afforded me a grand opportunity for my favourite study of variegated vernaculars.

I flatter myself that I have been ever apt at picking up the lingo of any places that I have visited within the United Kingdom or over seas.

Our prospects of sport—if not brilliant as regards quality and quantity of fur, feather and fin to be had—was of a pleasantly varied description. Hares and rabbits, snipe, cock, occasional mallard, black game (rare), plover, green and golden, pigeons, partridges and "various," whilst the Dart and its tributaries were full of trout—of a sort; somewhat diminutive it is true—about eight to the pound was the average—though occasionally a "monster" of fourteen ounces or so would grace the creel.

Salmon had been known to ascend to these upper reaches. It was my misfortune to come across a vagrant specimen; and thereby hangs a disgraceful tale. It was late in November when Harry Edwards, who had spent many years on military service in India, and had there proved himself a *pukka shikari,* and I, set out in pursuit of the elusive snipe. We picked up a couple of brace on Ridden Mire, and then made to cross The Dart, with a view to exploiting Bellivor Tor, there to contrive the circumvention of a bunch of golden plover which was known to favour the locality. Skipping from stone to stone I happened to glance down at a runlet, when my eye caught the shadowy form of a great fish that was lying quiescent therein. It was submerged in the clear water about a couple of feet.

Immediately I called my gallant brother-in-law's attention to the apparition. After a careful scrutiny he surmised it was a *sturgeon*—of all things in the world! I was an innocent in the ways and life history of the *salmo* family at that time, but Harry ought to have known better!

He searched about for a convenient stick, and when he had found one to his liking he unfolded his plan of action.

"Now be steady; I will quietly lift him to the surface. As soon as his head shows, let drive at it!"

I stood with gun ready.

The luckless fish did not seem to resent the lifting tactics. Presently my chance arrived and I pulled off.

There was a devil of a rumpus! My shot had grievously wounded the victim but failed to stun him. It leapt into the air and then went rolling and gyrating down stream, leaving a ruddy trail of gore in the water. It reached a pool some twenty yards lower down, where it continued its contortions. It was a pretty cold day, I promise you, but Harry had his clothes off in a jiffy, and, plunging in, succeeded in retrieving the fish, which proved to be an *unmended kelt*, a repellent monster, which, in condition, would probably have pulled the index to thirty pounds, but which, as we saw him stretched on the heather, could not have weighed half as much. It had a beak like an eagle, was as lanky as a half-starved pike, black, slimy and sinister.

And now that the fell deed was done my companion was conscience stricken, as I might have been, had I then fostered the fetish of the orthodox salmon angler, as I did in after years. My only regret was that the flesh of the fish was obviously unfit to add to the attractions of the Cator *menu*.

"Let's bury it, and try to forget it," murmured Harry gloomily.

And we did. Nor did we breathe a word of the disreputable adventure until years after.

I was for giving a vivid recital thereof to the rest of our bunch, but my brother-in-law bound me to silence with blood-curdling threats as to what would happen if I "went back on" him!

A propos my excellent relative by marriage, he was, as a rule, a positive puritan where sport of any kind was concerned, a *prieux chevalier*, who held that the slightest deviation from the unwritten Laws of the game, was sufficient to put the offender quite beyond the pale of his fellow sportsmen's esteem or even tolerance !

That is why the grievous lapse (the unforgivable crime of *shooting* a salmon—quite as reprehensible as bowling over a fox), so disturbed the depths of his soul. I am sure he dreamed of that dreadful fish again and again for years following the committal of the crime. Added to this, he took unto himself the discredit of having lured me, in my innocence, to be the perpetrator in chief of the unworthy deed.

None was so keen as he at all manner of shooting and fishing. He would brave the elements in their wildest moods in pursuit thereof, and would tramp from morn to night over hill and dale, through dangerous mires and over-rugged Tors, for the chance of a few shots at snipe, which were the favourite marks for his skill.

But there came a time when his ideas suffered a sudden *bouleversement.* It was not a *religious* " call " which pulled him up, but some psychological obsession which caused him to realize that *all sport is cruel*, and that it is wrong to slaughter the children of the wild, under the pretence that it is necessary so to do, in order that their poor bodies may be served up hot (or cold) for human sustenance.

So he gave up shooting and fishing and took up carpentering. I have often wondered if he was right ? I have even questioned myself and indulged in unproductive introspection on the question as whether—if I had my time over again—I would eschew the slaughter of the beautiful creatures of the earth and the waters under the earth. But the answering whisper has been : " These birds, beasts and fishes *prey upon one another.* If mankind did not foster sport, they would soon be decimated, if not altogether exterminated."

Anyway, sport, even when indulged in for the sake of slaughter, makes for virility of mind and body. Some Eastern castes which forbid the destruction of *life are horribly and persistently cruel to their domestic animals !*

But right or wrong, there is one class of individual whose arguments in this direction cut no ice with me. Such an one is he or she who, whilst grieving at the cruelty of field-sports of any and every kind, gloats over roast beef, boiled mutton, sausages and veal cutlets!

I should like to take him (or her) to see a bullock, maddened by the odour of blood, and an uncanny prescience of impending doom, indifferently pole-axed: or the patient sheep, bound on a trestle, and enduring the agony of the cruel knife, driven through the jugular vein and windpipe; whilst it's life blood thuds into a bucket, and oozes from its mouth and nostrils for many minutes before death brings relief.

I wonder how our "humanitarians" would regard a pig, stuck in the gullet, dashing aimlessly about its sty, until it drops exhausted from loss of blood? I know what he would say: "Oh, but it is *necessary* to kill such animals so *that he may live.*"

My answer is that it is *not* necessary. Man could well live on eggs, milk, cheese, fruit, vegetables and cereals, without the killing of a single one of the so-called "inferior animals." In fact I am confident that the general health, vitality and stamina of any nation or group that chose to adopt such a régime, would enjoy an infinite betterment.

This is my *theory.* My *practice* is—always has been and always will be—to enjoy any sport with rod and gun, horse or hound that comes my way, not for the purpose of obtaining necessary food, *but because I enjoy it!* So there!

Just below Cator Farm, and on the fringe of the moorlands, were some water-meadows whose lush grass was irrigated by a natural spring which bubbled up in a corner, surrounded by rushes and edged with bright green moss.

The first day I chanced across this verdant oasis I flushed a snipe, but being unarmed, I was unable to satisfy my blood-lust. However, I bore the little patch in remembrance; so the next time I approached it I was ready for emergencies, and had slipped a couple of No. 8's (by this time I was able to handle a full-sized Greener double) into my gun.

Sure enough "Mr. Scollopax" was at home, and as he rose with a protesting "scape-scape!" I cut short his career with my first and proceeded on my way in triumph.

Now it is an odd thing that this spring should prove an almost certain final for one snipe, and *one only.*

I have—on another page in this book—remarked how a particular stone, trench or " hide " in a river, will harbour a salmon persistently. As soon as one is caught, another is almost sure to take its place.

It was a similar case with this pellucid little spring and its visiting snipe.

It was a case of " one down, 'tother come on ! " though I drew on the reserve rather severely. Of course there were days when it was a case of " call again " ; but I reckon that on four out of five there was a " find," and generally a " kill," as by this time I had mastered the art of snipe-shooting, this form of gunning having been always a speciality of mine, and one which, later on, proved an excellent education for pigeon contests, the eye, the swing and the timing being very similar.

But for some reason or other the rear-guard of the snipe which patronized this spring became very wild and wary ; unlike the earlier habitués which had been confidingly close-liers. One would almost imagine that the shades of the departed had sounded a warning note to the survivors of their kind.

This persistence of single snipe, in frequenting a particular patch, reminds me of one Dan O'Rourke, an Irish farmer on the Ballynahinch Estate, on whose holding was a small spring —similarly visited by a single snipe. Every morning when Dan went to his work, he passed the spot, and regularly as clockwork that snipe would rise and dodge the shillelagh, which Dan invariably hurled at it with a withering curse.

At last the fatal day dawned when, by some dreadful decree of Fate, the million to one chance came off, and the luckless snipe failed to avoid " the sprig," which met it full-force in mid air and brought it lifeless to Mother Earth.

" Hooroosh ! " shouted Dan, as he rushed to gather the spoils. " Aw, a moighty foine shot, me bhoy ! More power te yez ! "

Then all of a sudden he pulled up and scratched his ruddy locks, as a horrid thought obtruded itself. " Ochone ! " he wailed. " Ut's a demented fule yez is, Dan O'Rourke. Faith !

uts yezelf *phwats zoo-und yez spoort fer good an' all!* Yez dod-rotted galoot!"

Talking of million to one chances, these come off more frequently than is generally imagined. Two instances spring to my mind as glaring examples. By your leave, I will quit, "Dardi-moor" for a space, in order to set them forth.

A young soldier friend of mine, fishing a well-known river in Norway, became fast in a heavy fish; but for some reason —perhaps careless bending on—the whole cast came loose from the line and was borne off by the salmon, leaving the angler utterly disgruntled. The next day he was fishing the same pool, when he had a pull. He says that, at the time, it struck him that there was something queer in the way the fish "took;" but he was fast, sure enough, and soon realized that he was dealing with a pretty lively and weighty customer. When at last he had the fish well under control and began to reel in, he was astonished to find that, when the end of the cast was close to the rod's top, so that the salmon should have been fairly near to the surface, it was still remote and boring deep. As he lifted the point he was utterly amazed to perceive his fly attached to another loop and a long length of treble gut; but he did not fully realize what had happened until he had his fish (a fine thirty-two pounder) safely on dry land. He had actually hitched his fly into the loop of the cast he had lost the previous evening. The fish was still on, and paid the penalty; though the gaffing of it, under the circumstances, was a difficult and touch-and-go matter; but by carefully retreating from the bank and ascending a friendly hillock he had enabled his boatman to ply the steel successfully.

Who can estimate the chances here involved? You have a big salmon moving about in rapid waters and dragging a cast, the loop of which owns a diameter of less than an eighth of an inch. The angler casts another fly at a venture and works it through the pool. How many times might this happen, 'ere his fly catches in the swirling loop?

A very knowledgable chap, when told this strange, eventful history, surprised me with the following thesis:

"My dear Cockie, the chances are not so remote as you might suppose. Imagine the salmon sulking behind a rock or some such object, head up stream. The whole length of the cast, gently oscillating, would float down stream almost in a straight line, and parallel to the surface and the bottom. The angler, casting another line over this, would stand a very good chance of engineering his fly so as to hitch up at some point in its length. As he drew in, it would slip along the submerged cast until it reached the loop, and then it would not be such very long odds, that the barb did not become attached. See!"

When you come to think of it, there is some logic in this argument; but nevertheless the occurrence was certainly an astonishing one. I believe it has never previously been recounted. My young friend had a hunch to send an account of the adventure to *The Field*, but on second thoughts refrained from so doing, being in deadly fear lest his veracity, hitherto like unto that of the immortal "G. W.," should be fatally impugned.

The second case is equally illuminating and somewhat similar; but does not entail such a sporting flare.

When fishing my friend Lord Cork's water on the Pang (the little river which runs into the Thames at Pangbourne) during the may-fly rise; in attempting to place my green drake in front of a leviathan trout which was taking down the nymphs with great gusts, I got hung up in the branches of a tall ash tree, in my rear. It was a hopeless entanglement, so after trying coaxing methods in vain, I had to exert a breaking strain, chancing my luck as to how much of my cast—if any—would be salved. It gave at the juncture with the line, and the whole of it was left dangling aloft, some twenty feet out of my reach. It was no good crying over spilt milk, so I affixed a new cast and fly, and went my way, as the big fellow was now "down"—no doubt, scared by my antics in trying to free my cast.

The following day, when I arrived at the spot, His Nibs was busy again. So I prepared my attack. It was a very awkward job, with those confounded trees in my immediate rear, so I was not over hopeful of presenting my offering to the trout in anything like efficient style. My fears proved well grounded, for after a couple of futile attempts, I again found myself hung up in the aggressive foliage, and again I essayed to get clear. This time my cast came away almost at once, and *with it the one I had lost the previous evening.* My green drake had affixed itself *to the gut loop* of my lost cast, and had safely drawn to hand the whole of it, with fly intact! What do you think of that as a specimen million to one proposition? In this case the chance was more remote than that previously dealt with, for obvious reasons, and especially when taking into account the reconstruction of the fish story, as visualized by my friend.

But I have wandered far from the wilds of the beautiful and picturesque Devonshire moorland, so let us hie back.

There were times when the spirit moved me to set out alone (save for the companionship of the redoubtable Cockie Junior), in search of adventure with the gun. On such occasions my enterprise often was rewarded with a plethoric and mixed bag.

Come along with me—in spirit of sportsmanship—and see how I fared on one particular expedition—a day which is clearly and proudly indicated in the calendar of my memory, though over forty years have elapsed since its enjoyment.

Starting from Cator early in the morning, I straightway made for the snipe-producing springlet in the water meadow. Sure enough my call was answered by a flick of wing and the familiar "scape, scape," as a "long-bill" darted off at lightning speed. I missed with my first, but my second caught him on the turn—a clean and clever kill.

I knew of a covey of nine partridges which frequented one of the few arable fields (roots) attached to the holding. This little enclosure was bounded by a high stone supported bank, with a thick growth of briar and fern on top, but on the far side of this there was a break or opening about three feet wide.

Almost as soon as I had set foot in the mangolds the birds were flushed. I dropped one with my right, then as the rest crowded together to pass through the aperture in the hedge I "browned" them with my left barrel!

"Shame!" you will cry.

Well, I have already admitted that, in those youthful days, I was an irreclaimable poacher, and I must brazenly confess that I exulted in the holocaust of feather that followed the report of my gun.

A leash of birds were down and out; whilst a fourth, after winging its way for a hundred yards or so, began to mount higher and higher in the firmament, until it suddenly ceased, turned over in the air, and fell perpendicularly to Mother Earth, where it lay on its back stone dead, as is the custom with "towering" partridges. Having gathered this little lot, I became aware that Master Cockie was busy on the top of the bank. There was no mistaking when my canine shadow was on "the goods;" for as an aid to the lonely gunner, he was a worthy successor of the beloved Tobias—long since passed to the happy hunting fields where ash plants are unknown and where vermin and convenient tree trunks abound. (Perhaps you know what a dog's ideal Paradise is?)

"A bunny," thought I; but I thought wrong!

There was a flick of rapid wings; but before the bird could clear itself of the close-growing tangle of briar and bracken, Cockie Junior made a lightning spring and caught it in mid air.

What was my astonishment to find it was a *woodcock*. The first of the season, and a well-conditioned bird at that. I regretted that I had not been vouchsafed a chance of trying my skill on the desirable *scollopax*, for I had yet to add one of its kind to my schedule of feathered victims; but after all, a bird in the bag is worth many in the air (to paraphrase a well-worn proverb). Moreover, I knew that The Dads would revel in the capture, when skilfully cooked and served upon toast, with "trail" complete.

Then I emerged upon the heather of the open moor, *en route* for Ridden Mire, famous for its snipe. I was not expecting game on the way, but I had hardly arrived at the ridge, overlooking the mire, when up jumped an old "jack" hare, which looked to my startled eyes, about the size of a young mule. Of course my terrier was at it in a moment, and so close was he to the scut, that I had no chance to loose off before my mark was some forty yards distant. I then let "lepus" have it with both barrels. He was, obviously, hit hard and good, but not sufficiently so to bowl him over. Away he went, with Cockie Junior coursing him gallantly. Pursued and pursuer soon topped the summit of the ridge and disappeared from sight: nor could either be seen when I also arrived at a point where I could scan the valley beyond.

After whistling and calling for my terrier until I was utterly fed up, I ran to the hill and set foot on the edge of the mire. Here a rather high stone wall had to be surmounted. I placed my hand on the top, and was lifting myself up when I heard a loud hiss and felt something rap my hand hard. I guessed what it was at once! An adder had been coiled on the wall, sunning itself, when my hand had disturbed it. With a deadly thrill of horror I examined that member. There was a red mark on the third finger of the left hand, but, glory be, the skin was not broken. Either that adder had suffered from caries or pyorrhœa and had so lost his fangs, or, in his hurry to be quit of my presence, had delivered an ineffective stroke; but it was a lucky escape for your Uncle Cockie anyway. No wonder he clean missed the first three snipe which gave him a chance.

Adders were superabundant on Dartmoor in those days, and may be so now. I had the satisfaction of blowing three of these obnoxious reptiles to smithereens during my progression through Ridden that day. Also when going to retrieve a fallen snipe, I disregarded the warnings which had been dinned into me anent the dangerous "moss-holes" which that mire possessed, and so was within an ace of paying a terrible penalty for my negligence. These death-traps are distinguished by the inviting-looking, bright green moss, which surrounds them. Once in their deadly embrace, with no succour at hand, the end is sure and horrific. In this case I felt I had made a *faux pas*, but, throwing myself backwards on to a tuft of round rushes and holding on like grim death, I was able to drag my one submerged leg free of the lethal grip.

This was a lesson which I took well to heart. Never again was I placed in similar peril, though I was witness of what might have proved an appalling tragedy had not prompt action saved the situation. It happened thus:

One day our party was beating an outlying mire, known to be particularly dangerous. Our farmer-host's lad—a boy of twelve—was leading our brace of setters on chain, when suddenly all three disappeared, as if the ground had suddenly opened and swallowed them up, and, Faith! that is *exactly* what had occurred!

The moss-hole was luckily a very circumscribed one, so we were able to get well within reach of the black, bubbling ooze in the middle of the verdant moss. Harry Edwards cast himself flat whilst Irwin and I held on to his feet. Plunging his arm into the mosses, my brother-in-law happily got hold of the dog-chain, by aid of which, and our united efforts, we succeeded in dragging dogs and boy to safety. This was the work of a moment, so none was the worse for the immersion, though all three presented a pitiable sight, reeking with black and fœtid mire. A dose of whisky administered to the weeping and thoroughly terrified lad quickly put matters right as far as he was concerned, whilst a swim in the Dart was all that was required to restore to the setters their pristine beauty.

CHAPTER IX

BY the time I had traversed Ridden Mire I had gathered unto myself two and a half couple of snipe. Not so bad! As I ascended the Ridge my eye was arrested by a white object among the heather, whilst a distant yapping was borne to my ears. On closer investigation I found that it was Cockie Junior, voicing trouble.

There he was, panting and utterly exhausted, and by his side lay the old jack-hare (now "gone west" for good and all), which he had evidently run down and killed and then had attempted to retrieve until nature gave out, when he had fallen back upon his tongue as a means of calling the attention of his master to his meritorious exploit. Goodness only knows how far he had dragged the victim, which was well nigh as big as himself. Truly a very gallant little dog!

On gaining the top of Ridden Ridge, Bellevor Tor revealed itself, with its stoney summit wreathed in wisps of silver mist. As I descended to the valley of the Dart, Cockie began to show signs that game of some sort was toward. He began nosing his way among the gorse and bracken, with his stump of a tail furiously oscillating. I thought that this might portend another hare. (By the way, I had secreted the old "jack" in a convenient cairn, "to be left until called for" on the return journey; he was much too weighty a burden to be lugged around during the whole of my peregrinations); but I was wrong in my surmise. The scent which so titillated the nostrils of my terrier, proved to be that of an antiquated black cock; *rara avis*, indeed, on this side of the Moor.

The wily bird was far too sophisticated to give me any sort of chance of bringing him to book, for he rose some two hundred yards away, and sailing majestically over the heather, perched himself, with a decisive whisk of his skew-tail feathers, upon a distant stone wall, where he continued to regard our operations superciliously. I knew it was no good attempting to stalk the joker *with a gun*, but I made an imaginary black mark against him in my memory, and determined to have his blood sooner or later.

Having negotiated a ford in the river, I began the ascent of Bellevor. The sides of the Tor were studded with patches of gorse, whose golden flowers added a gorgeous touch of vivid colour to the purple of the heather and the infinite shadings of the bracken.

There were a few rabbits in this locality, but I was not over keen on burdening myself with one or more of the odoriferous conies. These creatures had become a drug in my sporting market. Familiarity had, as usual, bred contempt. However, I allowed Cockie Junior to do a bit of hustling. Suddenly, with a rustle of wing there arose from the rough, game of a very different quality. Nothing less than another woodcock, which gave me an easy chance. I immediately availed myself of the offer, but the succulent bird fell in the very middle of what seemed to be an impenetrable gorse patch, the growth of which was old and tall. The only chance of salving my prize was to crawl on hands and knees under the stems, and so suffering the torments of the damned the while.

I thought of recruiting the terrier's skill as a retriever, but I knew he was more likely to chew up the long bill and to leave its remains where it fell, than to bring it to hand; so I chose the straight, narrow and exceedingly painful path. After many inward groans and anathemas I reached my objective, and made my way back a proud but dreadfully sore lad!

When at last I gained the stone cairn which crowns Bellevor I found that the mist was still clinging to the Tor, though it was now being gradually dispersed by a fitful breeze. On the Western side there was a bare expanse of stoney ground, where I expected to come across the golden plover. I figured that the drifting mist would give me a fair chance of coming to terms with the desirable birds; but much to my disappointment the bunch was " not at home "; so I went back to the cairn, and selecting a comfortable spot, sheltered from the keen north wind, I unpacked my frugal rations, and with an appetite whetted by my walk and the excitements of the chase, I set to work energetically with my teeth, sharing my bits and pieces with the voracious Cockie Junior.

The repast being concluded I lighted my pipe, but scarcely had I taken half a dozen pulls than I distinctly heard through the mist the whistling of golden plover. I could see nothing of the birds, but immediately afterwards the rush of their wings, as they passed at lightning speed, delighted my ears. I felt pretty sure that they would come to rest on their favourite billet ; nor was I mistaken. I hurriedly approached the spot, when a rift in the mist revealed a score of the golden flecked beauties, standing motionless, almost within shot of where I stood. I took the very necessary precaution of hitching Master Cockie on to the lead which I always carried, and then, lying prone, awaited a drift in the curling vapour, such as might enable me to dash in and take up position in close proximity to the bunch. This much-desired consummation soon materialised. Rising hurriedly I sprinted forward, and, as luck would have it, emerged from the damp shroud into clear atmosphere, within twenty yards of the plover, which were so surprised at the sudden apparition, that they seemed paralysed, and stood stock still on their toes with heads erect.

Indeed, I had to clap my hands to make them rise. For a moment my poaching proclivities had inclined me to " brown " the lot as they stood bunched together on the ground ; but the dawning spirit of true sportsmanship, as inculcated by my excellent brother-in-law, prevailed, so I decided to give the birds a fair chance.

I fancy this did not avail them much, for when they took wing I quickly snapped in my right, and followed up with my left as they turned in the air. It seemed to rain golden plover ! Five were stone dead, and two others winged, which gave Cockie, in retrieving them, his share in the exploit. As he was on the tracks of the livelier of the two cripples, the survivors of the bunch kept wheeling around him and swooping close to the ground. Seeing the possibilities offered by this manœuvre, I ran forward as fast as my legs would carry me, and was just in time to slip in a couple of barrels which brought three more of the venturesome birds to book. Good egg!

By this time I had had enough of it, for the shades of night were approaching.

> "Time had passed quickly, the shadows were long,
> The tit-lark had finished her evening song,
> And the gloaming was now at hand.
> I gazed at the tors so massive and bold
> With the setting sun glinting their edges with gold
> And lighting the purling stream."

Heavy clouds were gathering on the horizon and coming up swiftly against the wind. I sensed a severe thunder-storm, so turned my back on Bellevor Tor and quickly descending its slopes, I crossed The Dart. I clambered up Ridden Ridge. Darkness came on apace, and the clouds lowered threateningly. The rumbling of the thunder became more and more resonant. Then at last the storm broke, just as I had recovered the old "jack" hare, fastened him up with my handkerchief, and slung him over my right shoulder; my left being already painfully pressed by the strap of my bulging game bag.

The rain came down in sheets and torrents, so I had perforce to cower under a friendly boulder, with Cockie Junior, draggled and shivering, pressed closely to my knees. Dartmoor is:

> "Far from pleasant in dirty weather,
> With lightning flashing on stream and heather,
> And the cold blast cutting you through."

By the time the fury of the elements had somewhat subsided it was pitch dark, and though the thunder was rumbling in the distance *in diminuendo*, and the electric flashes were no longer overhead, a steady and cold rain had set in.

Well, a good drenching was inevitable, so there was nothing for it but to make a move. As I rose from my stoney "hide" I felt very cold, stiff and weary. I dared not sink the ridge and trust myself on Ridden Mire in the dark. The alternative was to follow along the ridge of the rise until it merged into Cator Hill. This would entail a much longer journey; but safety—first and always—was my motto.

Now, every step seemed to drag, and I was weary unto death. At last I figured that a quick descent to the left would bring me direct to the Cator homestead; but I had to grope and stumble my way; for, burdened as I was with my gun and the "dead meat," with which it had afflicted me, my progress was extremely slow and painful. At last I reached a point where I expected to strike the road; *but no road was there!* I turned in all directions, but my feet touched nothing but heather, fern, gorse or stone. A sudden horror overwhelmed me. I did not know *where* I was! I was utterly lost on Dartmoor on a bitter and stormy November night. My strength already exhausted, and my nerve shattered! What was I to do? I thought that Cockie's instinct might urge him to give me a lead that would bring me to the friendly farm, the cheery peat fire, the goodly fare (I was desperately hungry) and the beloved family circle; but the little dog was as disgruntled as his master, and only crouched nearer my heels, whimpering and shivering miserably.

Then came a brain wave. I would fire my gun as an S.O.S. signal. "I cannot be very far out of my reckoning," I informed myself. "They will hear it and come to our aid." No sooner thought of than done; but on searching my cartridge belt I found to my dismay that I had only three shells left. I had withdrawn two of them when I took shelter from the storm, and now they were wet and sodden. I forced them into the breech, and fired my first signal. The report echoed and re-echoed among the hills, and then there was silence, save for the swish of the rain on the bracken and the fitful sighing of the wind. I wasted fully ten minutes, which seemed like as many hours. There was no response. Then again my weapon spoke. Hardly had its reverberations petered out than there came a responsive report, apparently some half-mile away. My heart leaped with joy and thanksgiving. With trembling fingers I essayed to extract the spent cases and to insert my one remaining cartridge, but to my horror they refused to budge from the breech. I produced my sportsman's knife and tried to prize them out, but only succeeded in parting the metal caps from the sodden cases.

I felt like bursting into childish tears of rage and despair. Remember, I was then but eighteen years of age!

But I pulled myself together and started shouting, "Coo-ee!" (our family had long since adopted the Australian call as a means of distant communication) for all I was worth; whilst Cockie Junior joined in with an obligato of short, sharp barks. Bless him, he seemed to know now what was required of him. But nothing happened for some time. Again black despair was clutching at my heart and nerves, when all of a sudden there was the flash of a gun, and a loud report within a dozen yards of us. . . . I fairly screamed for help! The next instant Harry Edwards rushed forward and caught me in his arms, as I fell, overcome by weakness and reaction.

He sat me down, and pulling out his whisky flask, forced it between my chattering teeth. The fiery liquid to which I was altogether unaccustomed soon took effect, so that I soon felt quite chirpy again.

"I lost my way, Harry!" I said. "How far are we from Cator?"

"Oh, a few hundred yards. Do you feel equal to making a start! Here, give me your gun and game bag. By Jove, you seem to have filled it all right! And that old hare, too! Don't tell me you have been humping *that* along all the time?"

Oh, yes. I had stuck to my victims all right. Had I perished they would have remained as a proof of my powers; that is to say, unless the faithful Cockie Junior, driven to desperation by the pangs of starvation, but loath to leave my corpse, had devoured them, bones, feathers, fur and all, using my poor remains as a dinner-table! It seems that Harry,—as was often his wont—had started out alone that morning in search of a far distant and somewhat mysterious bog, known as Fox Tor Mire, where snipe and duck were said to abound in surprising quantities. After a tramp of some nine miles over very rough going, he had, in fact, found El Dorado; but the said mire was so deep and dangerous, and so dense with tall and rank growth, as to be almost impenetrable. He had tried to force a passage from several points, but could never proceed more than a dozen yards or so. However, he bagged one mallard, and "downed" another, which—not having a dog with him—he was unable to gather; whilst he had accounted for three and a half brace of snipe in an adjacent and more accessible marsh.

He was nearing home after himself having nearly lost his bearings, when he heard my second shot, and sensing trouble, replied; but it was a piece of pure good luck that he came within ear-shot of my "Coo-ee!"

As we moved off we saw lights, like fire-flies dancing below us. It was the party from the farm, with lanthorns. They had heard the gun-fire, and as they were beginning to feel anxious about both Harry and myself, they had sallied forth.

The forces soon met, and mutual felicitations and explanations were excitedly exchanged.

Never did I so welcome return to a warm, cosy farm hall, with its wide and open fireplace, and its glowing embers of peat! With what a gargantuan appetite did I sit down to a shoulder of little moorland mutton and onion sauce, snipe on toast, junket and Devonshire cream, with liberal libations of cider of the superior quality (save one from the raw native article!).

My bag, when laid out on the kitchen table, was a wonder and a joy to all beholders.

One jack hare (probably tough—but promising delicious soup or juicy jug), two brace of partridges, three and a half brace of snipe, two woodcock (one credited to Cockie the Dog, and one to Cockie the Boy) and nine golden plover, to say nothing of the three adders, whose shattered remnants were *not* gathered for the bag.

Oh, I was a proud and happy lad.

That night I slept the sleep of the just. Next morning I arose, none the worse for my overnight adventure, and as keenly bloodthirsty as ever. I had not forgotten the derisive old black-cock, and had figured out how to spill his gore. Discarding my twelve bore for the nonce, I armed myself with my rook-rifle, and a supply of cartridges, and sallied forth—making a bee line for Ridden Ridge, where I felt pretty sure His Nibs was again to be found, given normal luck. And so it turned out. As on the previous day, Cockie Junior soon had the wind of the truculent bird, and as before, the latter took wing—well out of gun shot—and made for the identical stance on the stone wall, from which he had crowed defiance yesterday. I affected to take no notice of his lack of good manners, so passed on unconcernedly; but when I had sunk the hill and was out of the bird's sight, I wheeled sharply to the left and took cover behind a second wall, which ran parallel to the one on which the dusky black-cock was perched. In this way I was able to get within a hundred and fifty yards of him.

I peered over my "O.P." There he was, craning his neck and looking towards the line of my retreat. I rested my rifle on the wall, drew a careful bend on the middle of his fat body, and let drive!

The sharp, but by no means loud, report was followed by a hearty "plunk!" as the lead found its billet, and let daylight into Mr. Black-cock's sombre soul.

He fell off the wall as dead as a herring, doornail or mutton!

He was a fine fellow as a "good-looker," but a tough, bitter and unpromising bit of provender from a culinary point of view.

Here again was I laying myself open to a charge of unsportsmanlike procedure; but my conscience did not prick me. On the contrary I rejoiced with an exceeding great joy! That wily old fowl would never have afforded anyone of us a fair or sporting chance; besides, an ancient fighting cock grouse—be he of the black or red variety—is an unmitigated nuisance on any moor; and here, where his kind were very few and far between, such as he, was a nuisance to the welfare and success of all those holding the Duchy license. I am glad to say that even my sportingly punctilious brother-in-law pronounced my deed justifiable "ornicide!" (please excuse the Greek and Latin coalition!)

On our own shoot there had been that season only one brood of the "Coqs de bruyère." These we one day shepherded to a convenient bit of cover, where Irwin bagged a brace and The Dads a single bird; but much to my disgust, I did not get a look in.

My chance was, however, soon to arrive. A neighbouring landowner of the name of Firth, of Hambledon Down, possessed a stretch of moorland noted for black-game, and good "sport" that he was, he invited our crowd to try its luck with him.

This was before I had plugged the patriarchal and solitary specimen, as detailed herein. Up to that time I had never seen a black-cock, except as depicted on paper or canvas, or set up in a glass case.

When we started on the incline of Hambleden we were told that we were not likely to come across any birds until within a few hundred yards of the ridge, though the heather here was high and thick. So I lighted my favourite meerschaum pipe (fancy smoking a meerschaum on a moor!), which I had been studiously colouring for a couple of months, and was marching at ease, when suddenly—almost under my very feet—and with a terrible clatter, there arose a bird which, to my startled eyes, appeared to be about the dimension of a Number One full-sized prize Christmas turkey. I threw up my gun—which I had been carrying over my shoulder—as best I could, and let drive both barrels wildly. Needless to say, the black-cock (for black-cock it sure was) winged his way unscathed; whilst I, in my startled excitement, had bitten clean through the amber stem of my cherished pipe! However, that day did not pass without my adding a brace and a half of young black-cock (grey hens were barred) to a bag which totalled five brace.

It seems that when my bullet had penetrated the ancient of Ridden Ridge, another black-cock of similar quality had come from goodness knows where, as heir to the deceased's estate. This one would seem to have had a *penchant* for Ridden Mire—a strange resort for one of its kind!—I suppose he went there for a drink. Anyway, brother Irwin caught him on the hop—I should say wing—one fine day. He offered a fair mark at say, a thirty-yards' rise. He slanted down on receiving the contents of the first barrel; but Irwin, to make sure, let him have the second when he was about a couple of yards from the ground. On going to pick him up, lo and behold, within a yard of the stone-dead black-cock a *snipe* was bobbing up and down with a freshly-shattered wing. The unlucky scollopax must have been rising just as my brother had popped in his left barrel.

Nearly every shooting man can tell of similar coincidences. Several have come within my personal observation.

On Dartmoor we thought a lot of a black-cock; but in after years I looked upon them somewhat contemptuously, though on more than one occasion I have had quite exciting sport in contriving their undoing. These happenings took place late in October and during November, but the following year we foregathered at Cator again, in the late summer, intent on plying the rod in lieu of the gun.

The Dart was full of fish—of a sort—playful little fellows, of which it took, on an average, five to level up a pound weight; but it required skill and experience to make a really good basket. To tell you the truth, I believe the majority of them were salmon par; but "little fish taste sweet," and all were trout that came to our nets. The returning of par to the water was a rule more honoured in the breach than in the observance. Anyway, there were countless thousands of the little chaps in the Dart, and the toll we took could not possibly have had any sort of effect on the run of salmon in years to come.

It was a great event when a genuine pound trout found its way to my creel. I think it occurred on about half a dozen occasions, though Harry got hold of a "monster" of nearly two pounds, but it was a logger-headed, ill-conditioned specimen, and could not compare with the really beautiful and succulent pounders which fell to my lot.

It was mild sport as fishing goes, but it was, nevertheless, a joyous game, amid lovely surroundings, breathing the free, pure air of the moor, and observing Nature and her children of the wild to the best advantage, under enthralling conditions.

As time went on, draining operations acted disastrously on some of the most prolific snipe mires. These sportive birds became rarer and rarer in those parts, until at last it was hardly worth while seeking them.

When, to my unutterable grief, the dear old Dads passed away in 1879 his little freeholds on Dartmoor were, by his will, divided between Irwin, my sister Ada, and myself. Bellevor and Drury were my portion ; whilst Irwin was allotted Cator, and Ada took two more remote farms.

But I had not the heart to visit my property. It was all so different now ! I gave instructions for its unreserved sale. Thenceforth " Dardi-moor " knew me and my poaching activities no more.

CHAPTER X

I HAVE gone into some details regarding my earliest experiences as an angler and shooter, for the purpose of giving an inkling of the spirit of the born sportsman, who wants to take a hand in any enterprise that may be afoot. The boy's first victim of feather and fur, and his first fish, are events which make an indelible mark on his memory. Such incidents are never forgotten, and are always treasured; but it would be a work of supererogation and one which would " feed up " the patient reader, if I were to enlarge upon my first pheasant, hare, snipe, woodcock, pike, perch, tench or chub—though the capture of the first trout might be admissible; but I will keep these thrilling experiences to myself and concentrate my attention on that auspicious occasion when, at last, I gazed on a *salmon* safely gasping on the river bank, the victim of my unaided skill.

It was in far Connemara, and hard by that wonderful inlet, known as Clew Bay, which claims an island for every day of the year, to be exact—365.

I had taken a three months' lease of Burrishoole (pronounced 'Brusshoole) Lodge, which stands on a promontory at the Newport end of the bay. With it were five thousand acres of rough (very rough!) shooting, with fishing for sea trout and salmon in the Glenderhawk stream and the Furnace Lough. The latter a famous piece of water from which the skilful angler might be sure of snatching a goodly toll of *salmo trutta*, with an occasional *salar* of modest dimensions.

It was when driving from Westport (ten Irish miles distant) to this desirable pitch that the native reputation for gross exaggeration was brought home to me.

I was met at the station by him who was to be my keeper, guide, philosopher and friend—one Michael Dever. Our conveyance was the ubiquitous and bumpy, jaunting car, which was drawn by an archaic steed possessing the thoroughly Hibernian name of Biddy. Hers was by no means a life of ease, for her acquaintance with a stout blackthorn was both forcible and chronic; each "whack" being accompanied by an encouraging, "Goo ahn!" from Michael. These admonitions were repeated at regular intervals of about thirty seconds, being interpolated as a kind of accompaniment to the conversation which my companion kept up with his passenger; though apparently they had no visible effect on the old mare, who treated both the vocal and the physical appeals with studied indifference. She refused to accelerate her pace, but kept jogging on without varying it one iota.

I should imagine that she was not only deaf but pachydermatous! On our way we passed a big sheet of water: naturally I was inquisitive.

"Any fish in that lough, Michael?" I asked.

"Faith an' there is yer 'anner—manny a wan. Aw, uts full av monsther poike, ut is. Ye nivver see the loikes av thim. So be ye hooks wan, uts loike teu pull yez out av the boat an' swaller yez whole, loike a shark!"

"Indeed! And pray what bait do they generally use for these man-eating leviathans?"

"Aw, whell yer 'anner—Oi don't roightly knaw, but *ut's a militia man in full uniform, O'im thinkin'!*"

I was greatly impressed, and being anxious to know what sort of sport we might hope to enjoy at Burrishoole, I followed up my interrogations.

"How are the grouse, Michael—is there a good showing?"

"Indade, an' there is that, yer 'anner. Whin yez goes out on the moors yez roise so manny av thim that it's sure loike a cloud obscurin' the sun!"

"Good!—and hares?"

"Aw whell, sorr, yez have teu be careful as teu how yez walks, fer fear uts fallin' over thim an' breakin' the neck av yez, yez are."

"Some hares! And are there plenty of snipe in the marshes?"

"Aw, there is that, yer 'anner! Faith, whin the divils shpring up lamentin', an' twist about in orl directions, uts loike to be pickin' wan another's oyes out they be—uts that thick they are."

This was encouraging, but I was still bent on exactitude.

"Are there any hippopotamuses in the river, Michael?" I asked casually.

The jarvey-keeper looked at me out of the corner of his eyes, somewhat suspiciously I thought; but after a pause he answered, and made reply, laconically:

"Sometoimes!—be noight!"

Is the foregoing dialogue authentic, you will ask?

On the word of an angler, which as everyone knows is—— Well, if you have any doubts you must blame my distinguished collaborator, *Ben Trovato*. . . .

"But what has this to do with your first salmon?" you will be wondering.

I had lost no time in going for the sea trout in Furnace Lough, and when conditions were favourable had gathered a goodly toll of the game and succulent fish. By way of variety, I thought I would try the Glenderhawk, which hitherto had been unfishable, owing to a lack of water; but now a good downpour over night had put the stream in ply. It is a narrow piece of water, but at intervals there are deep pools between steep, peaty banks. These look still and dour, but at times hold big sea trout and occasionally a salmon. I had creeled two-and-a-half brace of sizeable trout (the biggest nearly two pounds in weight), when on casting over one of these "moss-holes" there was a big boil at my "zulu." Instinctively I knew that this was something superior to a sea trout, and my heart leapt. Luckily the fish, whatever it was, was not pricked. Remembering what I had been told anent its being advisable to give ten minutes law to a salmon that has risen and retired untouched, before casting over him again, I sat me down on a tuft of heather, all of a tremor. Now had I known as much of the manners and customs of the normal salmon as I do now I should, then and there, have shown this joker the zulu again; but at that time I imagined that such a fish could be caught only with a salmon fly of orthodox pattern, so, with trembling fingers, I bent on a "Jock Scott" of medium size. The sun was obtruding itself, so I waited until a small cloud came over its face and then made the fateful cast. The fish came at it with a bang, and I was fast! After a sharp tussle, and several sprints along the bank, my prey was at my mercy and I slipped the landing net under him. Had he been a finer specimen than he actually proved to be, this operation would have been impossible, and I should have been in peril of losing my fish, for I could not have hand hauled him up those steep, peaty banks, and I had had no practice at "tailing."

Happily, my captive just fitted comfortably into the net and I bore him aloft in triumph and ecstasy.

Yes! a salmon right enough! Only a nine-pounder, but "Oh! how very fondly dear!"

Whilst still devouring my capture with my eyes an ancient native, who acted as watcher, came up. He thought he had rounded off a poacher. I had some difficulty in establishing my identity and my right to fish the Glenderhawk.

Pat Gallagher (for that was the worthy's name) was a rather weird character, with that strong strain of inborn poetical afflatus, which is found in so many of the inhabitants of Connemara. Subsequently we became great friends, and discussed all sorts of abstruse problems—sporting, political and domestic. He had a great store of ancient Irish legends with which he regaled me, what hours fishing was "off the map."

On this occasion he opined that I might supplement my present tally, as he had seen a salmon persistently rising above the bridge, which was about a quarter of a mile below where we sat.

Of course I was up and busy forthwith.

Sure enough, when we arrived at the point indicated, Pat's words were proved by demonstration, for there was a hefty boil under the far bank. The river here was much wider, but the vicinity of the rise was easily reached. With exalted aspirations I covered it accurately. Nothing happened; but whilst waiting, up came the fish again in the identical spot where he had first shown. My second venture was equally unproductive, and so on and so forth, though the fish kept bulging in between whiles. I tried every fly recommended by Gallagher, as well as my own particular fancies, but all to no purpose.

At last there was a mighty splash and plunge. I thought that a bolt from the blue had descended on the tantalizing salmon, but a simultaneous yell from old Pat indicated from whence the seismic disturbance had arisen.

" Take that, yez dirthy, ungrateful omadhaun," he shouted. " Uts not the loikes av yeu teu be playin' the fule wid the quality, bad cess teu yez for a slimey, mangey scaled, ill-conditioned cod fish ! "

Pat had hurled a great rock at the dour and disappointing brute.

I introduced my tenancy at Burrishoole as a bit of local colouring to set off the capture of my first salmon, but now I have started on this very sporting let I may as well deal with it here and now, without respect to chronological sequence.

There was an infinite variety of sport to be enjoyed in this delectable pitch. Had I known as much about the devious ways of feather, fur and fin as I do now, I could have duplicated my tally and evolved all sorts of gamesome sports.

As it was, Ted Jaquet and I, together with the various guests that from time to time honoured our shack, found plenty to employ us. We had an eighteen ton smack, very broad in the beam, and somewhat lethargic under sail. Hers were not exactly the perfumes of Araby, for they were redolent of the sea, and of the scaly crop reaped therefrom, plus the usual soupçon of tar and bilge water. She was euphemistically named *White Wings*. Hardly appropriate, having regard to her grimy sheets.

But she served us well.

In her we cruised about the 365 islands of Clew Bay, and even made several attempts to reach Clare Island—conspicuous nine miles west of the bay itself—but on each occasion stress of weather and the " safety first " principle constrained us to go about.

I am afraid we did not take proper advantages of the sea fishing which my later acquired knowledge now assures me would have been A1, especially with pollack, skate and other lusty denizens of the deep, though when the mackerel were in we set about them with a will, and thoroughly appreciated them as an addition to our dietary.

One sport we had which was an entire novelty to me, though I could not but regard it as a somewhat unsportsmanlike proceeding.

This was *spearing* skate and ray.

The operation could be put in force only during spring tides, where in certain bays and inlets the water was only from three to five feet deep.

The weapon in use was a pole about seven feet long, fitted with what looked like a glorified eel spear.

A zinc funnel or cylinder, about two feet in length and a foot in diameter was used to locate the intended victim. When this was sunk for half its length the spearsman, looking through it, could clearly discern every object lying on the bottom. Both skate and ray " lie low," and it is wonderful how Nature's camouflage or protective coloration renders them extraordinarily hard to locate, even in very shallow water. When the recumbent skate is spotted, the spear is passed through the cylinder and the stroke is launched. It requires much practice and skill before really deadly accuracy is attained. The correct spot to plant the spear head is just behind the juncture of the head with the body of the fish, so that the centre of the impact is on the spinal column.

Some of our catch were gigantic specimens, and when a sting ray was impaled and being dragged over the gunwale you had to be spry lest the brute should lash its whip-like tail around your arm and proceed to lacerate your flesh with its poisonous thorn.

Johnny Macdonald, our skipper and general factotum, was careful to warn us.

" Aw ! " he said (all the Connemarians preface their remarks thus), " an' the baste gets the tail av him round yer 'anner's arm, faith ! ut's desthroyed entoirely yez would be ! "

" Do you mean it would be certain death ? " I asked.

" Aw ! I do *not*, yer 'anner ; but the pain av ut would be loike teu droive yez crazy, an' uts sick yez wud be fer manny a week."

Another and milder game in which we indulged when spring tides were in was prawn catching. These crustaceans were the finest in size and flavour that I have ever met with. We used a triangular net, wading knee deep and shovelling under the weed-grown rocks. Both in this connection and the skate-spearing the water was beautifully translucent; crystal clear, with a submarine garden of infinite variety of form and tint. I have gazed into those decorative depths for long minutes together, marvelling at the infinite and altogether satisfying beauty of Nature in her kindliest mood.

There was a colony of seals in Clew Bay, but they were very wary. I tried several stalks with my Winchester, but met with no success. Ted, my ever-ready Fidus Achates, was more fortunate, for one day he returned in triumph with a couple of natives, bearing a half-grown grey seal on a pole. We were loud in our felicitations, but, when later my lusty cousin proceeded to skin the victim of his skill on the lawn, just when we were thinking of our mid-day meal, our congratulations turned to curses, loud and deep. The aroma of that confounded creature reduced us to such a state of nausea and olfactory repulsion that we lost all hope of enjoying our repast Moreover, it remained in our nostrils for an unconscionable time. But the depths of Ted's capabilities as a *parfumier* were as yet by no means sounded.

McDonald had told him that on a certain one of the 365 islands of Clew Bay—Innistorwhele to wit—there was a flock of wild mountain goats, the "boss billy" of which carried a fine set of butting implements and a patriarchal beard. My life-long pal, having accounted for a seal, had now set his gallant heart on big game shooting. No more for him the inconspicuous grouse (which many a time and oft he missed), the elusive snipe (which he invariably muffed), or other such small deer. To Innistorwhele he went and we heard nothing of him for some hours. At last the faint report of his rifle was wafted across the waves. As the shades of evening fell the *White Wings* drifted into port, and Ted and McDonald disembarked, the latter bearing in his arms the gory head, with honours complete, of the Monarch of the Capricornian harem.

The big game shooter was puffed up with unpardonable pride and had a stirring tale to tell of the stalk which had ended in the death of the hoary billy. But some days later, McDonald, elated by too free indulgence in illicit potheen, gave the show away. It seems that during the previous winter, the weather had been so unpropitious that the goats of Innistorwhele were unable to obtain sufficient nutriment, and were in parlous plight; but some humanitarian (I think it must have been Mr. Oram, the good factor of Burrishoole) became wise to the situation and made arrangements whereby the odoriferous animals were regularly fed from the mainland, with the consequence that they soon grew confidential and quite tame. It is wonderful how the cravings of hunger act in subduing the natural timidity of Nature's wild children. So it came to pass that the goats, being possessed of excellent memories, and imagining that Ted's cutting-out expedition was simply a renewal of last year's relief arrangements, came scampering down from their hilly fastnesses led by the hirsute and magnificent William, bent on a banquet at the hands of the invaders. Our head man went on to say that when Ted had his back turned to the throng, and was stooping to fasten a boot lace, the aforesaid William so far forgot himself as to take a running leap at my cousin, implanting a vigorous if playful butt on the most prominent part of his person.

The impact sent Ted sprawling. This unprovoked assault raised his ire so that he there and then determined to put "paid" to any further indecencies of the kind. But being, all said and done, a sportsman born and bred, he gave the offending billy what he considered sufficient law. Our faithful bull-terrier Randy (show name, "Champion Streatham Monarch II") was loosed on the offending goat, who at first treated the dog with contempt, attempting to administer the same paralysing shock as he had awarded Ted; but he did not know Randy and his implacable methods. A very pretty scrap ensued, witnessed in awesome silence by William's houris and the human adventurers. The battle waged furiously, first one and then the other appearing to hold an advantage.

All of a sudden the goat, realizing that he was up against a stiffer proposition than he had bargained for, threw up the sponge, and " beat it " for all he was worth, closely pursued by the blood-thirsty bull terrier, who, however, was sternly called off.

After William, attended by his faithful spouses, had retreated some five hundred yards, he mounted the pinnacle of an adjoining hillock and bleated defiance at his treacherous enemies. It was then that Ted effected his self-belauded stalk. By a circuitous route he managed to get within a hundred yards or so of the braggart. (He dared not approach closer, for fear of a repetition of the creature's vigorous offensive.) Then, taking up a prone position, he drew a bead just behind the ill-fated goat's shoulder and let drive. Billy leaped into the air, and then rolling over and over, lay still at the base of the hill.

" *Sic transit gloria Capricorni.*"

But the spirit of him—supposing that such animals can claim survival of soul after death—remained to afflict not only his destroyer, but all who came in touch with the grim trophy which Ted had had set up by Rowland Ward, who, in returning it—most artistically mounted—politely but firmly requested my cousin not to send any more heads of the same species, as in such case he would be likely to lose the services of his most skilled assistant taxidermists.

Previous to this, we of the Burrishoole contingent had protested loudly against the dreadful infliction on our olfactory organs.

The seal had tried us severely, but its odour was as that of attar of roses, when compared with the effluvium disseminated by that grizzly goat's head. I have had a slight dose of chlorine gas and survived it ; but if the Huns, during the Great War, had been able to evolve an extract, such as that which caused us such nasal affliction, I am convinced that the question as to which side really won the war, would have been set at rest once and for all—and not in *our* favour !

Ted tried it on his domestic circle when he reached home, but the offensive trophy was immediately thrown into the dust-bin. Then he bethought him of a secret enemy, to whom he owed a long-standing and savage grudge. William's head was carefully packed and despatched to this worthy. An obituary notice in *The Times* indicated that a tragedy had taken place; but happily no prosecution for manslaughter issued.

CHAPTER XI

RANDY'S wind was up, after his affair with the billy goat of Innistorwhele. I think he had a hunch to swim over to the island, and take it out of the surviving hill climbers; as he was ever gazing over the water to the distant islet. But, apparently, thinking better of it, he eschewed goat flesh, and chewed mutton in the shape of an innocent lamb, which, having lost its dam, was being brought up by hand at a local cottager's. Naturally the owner waxed exceeding wrath, and put in an excited appearance, bearing what remained (mostly wool and gore) of his cherished lambkin in his arms.

" Aw, yer 'anner," gasped Terry Millighan—for such was his name—" see phwat yez dirthy, shark-faced son av a disgraceful mother has done teu me poor, helpless lamb—bad cess to 'im for a mangy, squint-eyed, three-cornered cur dog—teu Hell wid'm ! "

There was no gainsaying the transgression; for Randy had been caught *flagrante delicto*, and was rendered particoloured by tell-tale crimson stains, and slavering jaws.

I was furious! I had never known my favourite bull terrier to be guilty of such truculent rascality before. My first impulse was to belabour him within an inch of his life; but after careful consideration I fell back on what I hoped might prove a far more efficacious punishment, and one which I hoped would give the backslider furiously to think before venturing on any similar atrocity. I tied what remained of the unfortunate lambkin to his neck, gave him a sharp reminder with an ash plant and shut him up in an outhouse.

At intervals I visited him, and each time admonished him with tongue and stick; with the consequence that he became utterly fed up with the too intimate company of his victim's corpse. When at last he was released from durance vile and the adhesive incubus, he was exalted with joy and thanksgiving, and signified the same in the usual canine manner. The Ancient Mariner could hardly have felt more relieved when the bindings of the defunct albatross slid from his neck.

As for Terry Millighan, he was solaced with a five pound note (there *were* such pleasant pledges of the Bank of England in those days).

" The Holy Saints bless yer 'anner ! " he exclaimed fervently. " Faith an' ut's meself phwat whill be havin' another lamb seun ; an' if so be, yer 'anner and yer 'anner's iligant dog whill be wantin' moore spoort, be gob, ye're welcome—more power teu yez both ! "

Now I did not appreciate being identified as an accomplice of Randy's crime, either as an accessory before or after the fact ; but what was the use of arguing the matter with an ignoramus such as Terry. I just let it pass !

It is said that when once a dog has taken to mutton mauling the obsession is incurable ; but I can vouch for it, that " Mr. Champion Streatham Monarch II " never again molested a sheep. He couldn't bear the sight of one ; nor would he partake of the flesh thereof ; unless camouflaged by culinary art. So that was that !

There came over to join the gay throng at Burrishoole, a youngster of tender years (about twenty of the same) whom we will call Dicky Garnett. At this time the Fenians were busy, and it was reported that Connemara itself was not free from their nefarious activities.

We had been discussing the matter after dinner one evening over our pipes. Ted Jaquet, who had been gazing thoughtfully at our young guest, noting the pallor of his countenance and the intermittent tremors which shook his elegant figure, had a brain wave which his fertile resource converted to action, with—I am sorry to say—our connivance.

Ted was an inveterate practical joker, and this seemed to be a grand opportunity for the exercise of his ingenuity in this direction.

One stormy night, when the windows rattled and the wind moaned around the ancient homestead, Dicky Garnett and I were sitting over the fire smoking our final pipe before turning in. I had been regaling my young friend (destined hereafter to become my subaltern in the Duke of Camb's Hussars) with bloodcurdling tales of Fenian atrocities. The others had, professedly, retired to their respective couches, pleading "dead tiredness," following on a strenuous day on the hills, after grouse. Dicky's back was toward the casement, on which the rain beat persistently.

Now let *him* continue the story.

"I happened to look up at Cockie (that's me—I should say 'I'), and never have I seen such a look of fixed horror as his homely features displayed. He was looking beyond me at the window, with it's weeping rain tears. I glanced round quickly. My heart leaped, and then seemed to stop altogether; for there, gazing in on us, was a masked face! I felt frozen to my chair; but the next moment, there was a thundering at the door. Cockie sprang up. At first I thought he was 'doing a guy' and leaving me to my fate; but he had gone to fetch his revolver.

"The door burst open and three men, muffled in long jarvey coats, with typical Hibernian corbeens, and all closely masked, rushed in.

"'Hands up, yez divils,' shouted our host, levelling his weapon. The raiders obeyed with alacrity; but the window had been noiselessly opened and a portly figure garbed and masked like the other intruders, made a spring at Cockie from behind to pinion him. Ere this movement on the part of the outflanking criminal could be effectively carried out, Cockie's revolver spoke. One of the miscreants in front gave a loud scream, leaped into the air, and—falling forward on his face—lay still! The others bolted, with Cockie at their heels. As he ran he shouted to me to fetch my gun and follow, but I felt paralysed. However, I managed to find the weapon, snatched up a couple of cartridges which lay on the table handy and legged it along. I came up with my host near the water; we were both out of breath.

"'It's no good Dicky,' he gasped. 'They've offed it and got clean away. Come along, let's get back and see what's happened to the guy I let daylight into. He looked pretty bad anyway.'

" When we regained the house we found Robber Hinde and Ted Jaquet, in their pyjamas, gazing in awe at the prone and motionless figure on the floor of the smoking room.

" We were besieged with questions and Cockie had to give a recital.

" ' And now, what are we going to do with this ? ' he said in conclusion, at the same time administering a kick to the poor 'corpse.'

" ' Aw yer 'anner, ut's meself phwats fair toired av lyin' here wid me face on the fluer. Faith and it 's a drap av the crathur oi'd be havin' teu revoive the sowl av me ! '

" McDonald by all that was wonderful !

" He sat up and grinned.

" Then another 'Fenian' entered upon the scene and removed his mask.

" Bedford ! Our host's imperturbable and impressing valet !

" Hinde and Jaquet produced masks from behind their backs. The game was up."

This, as far as I can remember, is the account of the spoof, as rendered over and over again by Dicky Garnett, years afterwards. If the writing which I have set down is not verbatim according to Dicky, it is " in words to that effect."

(No ! my esteemed collaborator *Ben Trovato* had nothing to do with the compilation.)

Now I must not omit an episode which occurred the second night after my arrival at Burrishoole. Ted and I had the shack to ourselves and were drawing up an *itinerary pro forma*, for the next day's sporting expedition.

I happened to look out of the window. It was a dark night ; but in the distance I could see half a dozen lights dancing like fire flies, where I judged the banks of the Glenderhawke river to be.

Calling Ted's attention to them, I announced my intention of investigating the phenomena.

The servants had all retired to rest, so I suggested that my cousin should remain on sentry go, whilst I proceeded with my reconnoitring.

I sallied forth unarmed and made my way over the rough, until I gained my objective.

Here I found a gang of a dozen of " the bhoys " cheerfully and diligently engaged in dragging the river.

" What the blazes are you up to ? " I yelled. " Don't you know this is private water and that you're poaching ? "

The operators took very little notice of my complaint but continued their nefarious occupation, so I repeated my challenge.

One of the malefactors (head lad probably) turned his head at last.

" Aw, shure yer 'anner, uts ourselves phwat knows uts proivate propertee, but not proivit for the loikes av us—St. Pathrick be praised ! Now ut's a good gossoon ye'll be, and set yez quoiet on that shtone, an so be as ye makes no fuss av ut, faith, we'll be fer givin' yer 'anner a foine salmon. But anny moore av yez bleatin', an' inter the river yez goes. Mark that now ! "

I was left guessing again !

But I am, thank goodness, blessed with a sense of humour. How else could I have borne the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune which were hurled at me in after years, not in single spies, but in battalions (rather mixed metaphor this I fear, but it must serve).

I could not help seeing the humorous side of my own predicament.

So I sat me down, lighted my pipe and watched the poaching operations, which happily were of a somewhat primitive nature, so that the haul was no " miraculous draught of fishes."

But Mr. Jerry Gilhooly (the aforesaid boss) was as good as his word, and not only presented me with a nice fresh run ten pounder (a rarity in those parts and at that season of the year), but even offered to carry it up to the house for me.

This gave me my cue ; so I addressed the gang in the vernacular. (I rather pride myself on picking up and reproducing dialects. Be it said that there are as many variations in pronunciation and cadences in Old Ireland as there are in England, and for the matter of that, North of the Tweed.)

"Shure," said I, "yez bhoys must be cold and whet teu the shkin av yez. Faith ut's the frozen noses av yez that needs be in a mug av the crathur. Come yez up teu the cabin and Oi'll be dosin' yez wid the rale shtuff, an' divil a mite av excoise paid upon ut!"

My suggestion was received with acclamation. Not only the vile alcohol, but a fistful of white bread and soapy cheese, was doled to each of the campaigners. My health was drunk uproariously.

"See here bhoys," I said as I wished them good-night. "Next Sabbath as ivver is, come yez up wid the woives, sisthers, cousins, ants and the collyeens av yez, an ut's a foine kick up we'll be havin'. Is it game y'are?"

The answer was in the affirmative . . . emphatically so! The gala night arrived, and with it practically the whole country side. The formality of invitations having been dispensed with, the result, as far as numbers were concerned, was most gratifying. It was a motley throng and all were bent on enjoying themselves, making an infernal row, drinking as much as they could hold, dancing themselves silly, and ending up with a free fight. (The last item being *sine qua non.*) This programme was faithfully carried out. Never was there such a shuffling of hobnailed boots or bare feet (according to the social quality of the terpsichoreans) on the kitchen "flu-er." Never had the bucks of Connemara been so well primed with mountain dew; and consequently never had the colleens been made love to so ardently and persistently. Unhappily the latter pastime was somewhat discounted by the late arrival of Father O'Reilly, who was a stickler for a reasonable observance of the conventions.

Of course there were many cases of deadly rivalry which promised "wigs on the green" ere the entertainment was brought to a close. One of the worst of these green eyed phantasies was conjured up by no less a person than my portly and exuberant cousin Ted, who—though his wife was way back in the land of the Saxon—posed as a widower, and in this guise made violent overtures to Nannie McGoorty, one of the few really pretty daughters of Erin present. As Mr. Dan Heggarty, the local blacksmith, had for years watched her growing up, and had marked her for his own, you can imagine that the keen eye of observation which he bent on Ted was of the very lemon order; so I detailed Michael Dever and Johnny McDonald to keep a watch on the young disciple of Vulcan, lest his Hibernian blood should reach such a caloric and choleric height that, urged by jealousy and alcoholic indulgence, he might proceed to the "doin' in" of his hated rival. By the exercise of a little tact and much whisky, we reduced Dan to the maudlin and affectionate stage of inebriation, which of course rendered him supremely happy and amiable—if somewhat repulsive.

I have been ever addicted to "the light fantastic" both from an eccentric and a conventional and technical point of view, so when Martin Doyle began scraping his fiddle strings and Matthew O'Dowd played upon the pipes, I rushed into the fray.

Now it happened that Johnny McDonald fancied himself as a dancer, that could outskip and outstay any native rival or "anny dirthy Saxon—savin' yer 'anner's pardon,"—that dare take him on.

This unseemly boasting was not to be tolerated, so I determined to see if I could not abate his conceit.

The "fluer" was cleared, and all stood around watching the duel, and loudly applauding the efforts of the combatants. Well, in those days, I was pretty fit and vigorous; so at the end of half an hour's dancing—without a moment's breather—the skipper of the *White Wings* threw up the sponge, and I was hailed the winner amid the unrestrained plaudits of my guests.

At last the party broke up, and with bibulous expressions of undying love and devotion, drifted off. A big contingent had to cross a neck of the bay, in a dilapidated ferry boat, the holding capacity of which was strictly limited. I had said good night to the last of the bhoys and was settling down to a contemplative pipe, when suddenly there arose above the whining of the wind, most appalling shrieks and yells in which the baritones and basses of men were drowned by the lamentations, in soprano, of the women. These weird cacophanies seemed to come from the locality of the ferry.

"Good God," thought I, "they have overcrowded the boat and it has capsized!" Up I jumped and ran for all I was worth in the direction of the rumpus, but I had not gone far, before I was stopped by Michael Dever.

"Aw, for the love av Moike," he pleaded, "ut's not safe fer yer 'anner, shure ut's the bhoys phwat is throwin' stones."

"Throwing stones?"

"Faith, they is that, sorr, shtones as big as the top av Crowpatherick,* an' so be as wan was teu drap on the head av yer 'anner, ut's desthroyed entoirely ye'd be, leastwise unless yer 'anner's skull is as thick as Johnny McDonald's spach afther an illegant wake."

"But what's it all about, Michael?"

"Aw, just nothin' at all, at all, yer 'anner; just a bit av pleasanthry loike. Faith ut's a custom. Phwat wud be anny use in a grand ball loike phwat yer 'anner—more power to yez—has give the bhoys, if so be a free foight wus not teu end ut?"

"But why do the women shriek like that?'"

"Aw, ut's the nature av women folk, yer 'anner. Shure ut's givin' tongue they are, so by they may encourage the men folk av thim teu foight ut out!"

I had to leave it at that.

Next day, I regret to say that cousin Ted so far forgot his marital vows, and his usually strict observance of the "safety first" principle, as to follow up his adventure with the fair Nannie McGoorty, whose mother's cabin was some two Irish miles over the hills. He found the really pretty colleen all right, and according to his own account, was most graciously received; his excuse for the call being a parching thirst, which nothing could assuage short of a glass of milk straight from the McGoorty cow (Ted really loathed milk as an unmixed beverage). Moreover he succeeded in getting Mrs. McGoorty out of the way; but just as he was about to beg a kiss from Nannie's ruby lips, a shadow darkened the cabin door and the burly form of Dan Heggarty was revealed.

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* Crowpatrick, the most conspicuous mountain of Connemara, from which St. Patrick is said to have driven all the snakes and reptiles into the sea.

"The top av the marnin' teu yer 'anner," said the unwelcome intruder, doffing his corbeen and grinning sardonically. "Ut's hopin' ut's well yez be, sor-r. Faith ut's a proud man Oi am sor-r, teu see yez so plazed wid me colleen phwat is teu be me woife come Christmas—the Holy Saints so willin' ut!"

Ted bowed his acknowledgments.

"An' now, an' ut plazes yer 'anner ye'd best be skippin' as fast as the fat legs av yez whill carry yez; fer if so be ye've not a move ahn afore oi've counted foive, ut's knocking the ugly, bald patched head av yez arf entoirely Oi whill be—wid arl respecks teu yer 'anner's person. But if so be ut's trying a bout wid me wid the bare fists av yez, yez'd be axin', come yez out inteu the back yard, so be Oi can chop yez up and ate yez, yez fatheaded fule—beggin' yer 'anner's pardon."

Ted declined the contest and turned away with as much dignity as he could command without even a backward glance in the direction of his erstwhile charmer. He says he heard her sobbing; but Dan declared, when relating the episode to Johnny McDonald, that Nannie was "nigh teu disthruction thru' the larfin' av her!"

I think I have already remarked that though salmon frequented the Furnace Lough in considerable quantities, they were a dour and ascetic crowd given to lengthy fastings; consequently the capture of one of the clan was an event which called for a red letter mark in our sporting calander.

Sometimes one would be tempted to look at a fly and to make a great to do on the surface of the water; thus filling the angler's palpitating heart with hopes never to be realized. This refinement of tantalization would be repeated again and again, every time the lure passed over the particular rock or trench where the fish was presumably lurking; but never a touch would be felt. At last the patience of the fisherman would wane, and he would give it up in despair.

But on one occasion, a venturesome salmon, after playing me this unworthy trick, became reckless and snapped my "claret and grouse,"—possibly by accident—and I held him. I had not had him on long when I became conscious of a peculiar double drag on my line. I had been casting the said "claret and grouse" as a stretcher with a "fiery brown" —a favourite with the sea trout—as a bob fly.

Presently it dawned upon me that one of the latter tribe had seized the "bob" whilst I was playing his weightier cousin on the tail fly; so that now I had two customers to deal with. It is not often that one has the chance of playing a salmon and a sea trout simultaneously on the same cast, is it? The by no means welcome "*trutta*" of course took the direct control of the "*salar*" out of my hands and enabled the latter to free itself. I brought the sea trout to net; a nice fish of one and a half pounds; but it was not by any means a welcome guest in the boat. In fact in delivering the *coup de grâce* on the boat's gunwale, I performed the act with such spleen that I practically knocked its precious head off. Surely, my nasty temper, was, under the circumstances, excusable?

But a day came when I actually *did* extract a salmon from the Lough. I had been having fair sport with the sea trout, and when drifting some forty feet from a rocky shore, I made a long cast where the water rippled around, and lapped upon, a semi-submerged boulder. As my fly swung round, there was a big boil, and I found myself fast in something which sure was not a sea trout. My supposition proved correct. McDonald knew what was up and acted accordingly.

"Aw, praize be teu the blessed saints! Faith ut's a salmon yez have, yer 'anner," he shouted, and commenced to get a good way on the boat; so that I was able to keep a tight line on the fish, which gave me fifteen minutes' keen excitement, ere the net was slipped under it. It proved to be only nine pounds, but was in excellent condition. I was highly delighted, and "Mac"—on the strength of the adventure—indulged in an extra glass, or two—or three—of his beloved potheen.

Now for the sequel, which exemplifies the great reach possessed by the long arm of coincidence.

There had arrived at Burrishoole that day a new guest, a club friend known as "Robber" Hinde. The rather opprobrious pseudonym having been awarded him owing to his uncanny habit of winning at pyramids, no matter how severe his handicap.

He will be remembered as figuring as a "Fenian" in the terrorizing of Dicky Garnett, as already related.

He was a dead keen fly fisher, so after dinner, I regaled him and the rest of our bunch with a stirring recital of my capture of the salmon, which we had just devoured with much gusto.

The next day, he accompanied me on the Lough, and when we were on the same drift that had produced my victim and approaching the lucky stone, I spoke him thus:

"See that stone, Robber? That's where I got into my fish yesterday. I made a long cast like this (suiting action to word) and just as my fly came round on the lee of the rock like this—Here!—hi! blessed if I haven't got another!" And faith, so I had! So equal in weight and alike in appearance were these two that they might have been twins.

These two salmon were the only ones caught in the Lough that season.

I have since noticed how very frequently salmon seem to favour some particular "lie" behind a boulder, in a depression or trough on the bottom, or under the ledge of an overhanging bank. Pull a fish from out such a hide one day, and another will have taken his place the next. I shall have something more to say on the subject when I come to tackle my Norwegian experiences, where this phenomenon is constantly displaying itself.

CHAPTER XII

AT the time of my marriage, I had never been north of the Tweed; but three years later, after disporting myself at Hurlingham and Ranelagh with whip and spur, and at the former and the Gun Club with villainous saltpetre (or its nitrate substitute) throughout the London season, I began to cherish the idea of visiting "the land o' cakes," during August and September. Not that rugged scenery appeals to me very strongly, my soul being far more deeply stirred by pastoral beauty; especially in the halcyon days of Spring; but, nevertheless, I am not prepared to go all the way with Samuel Johnson in asserting that the only good road in Scotland is the straightest and shortest *out of it!* Moreover, I had yet to shoot a red-grouse; though, as herein before chronicled, several of the black, skew-tailed variety had fallen to my shot. And were there not on those forests and heights noble stags to be stalked, besides roes and other small "deer," such as "cock," snipe, duck and what not! Then, thought I, if I can but find a pitch where salmon and trout lend enchantment to the let, I can have a bully time!

So I sought out that *rara avis*, a reliable sporting agent, and invited him to lay his wares before me.

In the end I was tickled by a partnership proposition, and one Collinson Hall was advertising half-share in Glencalater, by Braemar, and this bit of sporting Scotland was highly recommended by the agent as having been "personally inspected" and vouched for. I may here interpolate that in later years this same Glencalater was occupied by my old friend the late Mr. Panmure Gordon, who, I believe, enjoyed the doubtful honour of entertaining "Kaiser Bill" at the lodge.

So the 10th of August found my C. O., my first-born (Raymond), my gentleman's gentleman and myself *en route* for

Glencalater, packed with our impedimenta in a ramshackle "ma-chine" drawn by a steed painfully troubled with the slows, in one of those tedious road trails which so often tax the patience of long-suffering Sassenachs who set foot in "Mac-land."

The only diversion was that caused by my son and heir—then about eighteen months of age—who would persist in removing my cap from my head and heaving it into the roadway. As this operation was repeated every few minutes, our progress was materially delayed.

At last the Lodge hove in sight and at its gates we were met by my "pard" that was to be, and his wife.

The former was a colossal figure of a man, over six feet in height, and well endowed with solid (perhaps too solid) flesh. He sported luxurious face-fungus, in the shape of side-whiskers and a walrus moustache; whilst his rubicund countenance sent forth a genial effulgence which promised a wealth of warm *camaraderie*.

His spouse was not a thing of beauty, but she had a warm and tender heart, which immediately displayed itself by the way in which she took our child—much to his terror and aversion—to her ample bosom.

The 11th was spent in inspecting the kennels, in which were housed a team of three very likely-looking laverack setters, a single liver and white pointer, and a brace of ditto spaniels (the last-named being much of the type of the show-bench springer of 1922).

The shooting was to be entirely over dogs, which suited my taste down to the ground.

I inquired about the fishing, and was informed that the river Calater and the loch of the same name were full of salmon, but that the water was so low that any hope of capture by legitimate means was out of the question.

However, I impressed the head ghillie, Alec Grant, into my service, and induced him to take me on a tour of inspection. I was not going without my rod; but, on arrival at the "river" (it was now only a narrow trickle meandering through a dry, rocky bed) I found that its hopeless state had been no way exaggerated.

Whilst crossing from stone to stone I saw Grant stoop and peer into a rivulet.

"Sirr," he exclaimed, "a fush lees herre; will ye hae a squint at him?'

I came over, and sure enough there was a salmon of about ten pounds "lying doggo," in a sort of trench.

"Man," said the ghillie, "pet yere rod up. I'll slip the hook ender his jaw, and ye can hae a bit o' spoort wi' him foreby!"

No sooner said than I was at work. All being ready, the wily Grant proceeded with his fell purpose, with the result that, as I stood back, there was such a mighty rush and plunge that the rod was nearly pulled out of my hand. I had to sprint for all I was worth, as the now thoroughly awakened and terrified fish threaded its way at lightning speed between the boulders, and up the rivulets with its dorsal fin out of the water for most of the journey.

Just as I was thinking it would out-pace me and get a straight pull on the line, the fish obligingly saved me any further trouble by running itself high and dry on the beach, where it was immediately grabbed by Grant.

This was a naughty performance, but in a way, it was decidedly humorous. Worse was to come, for on an off-shooting day, a week or two later, my pard fitted out an expedition to *net* Loch Calater. I watched the dastardly operations interestedly, but when, at the first haul, eighteen nice salmon, averaging about nine pounds, were pulled out, flopping and gasping in the fatal meshes, I felt sorely grieved. If I could have induced only one of them to accept a fly, or even a spoon or "Devon" I should have been more than delighted. But even in those early days, I knew enough of salmon and their ways to recognize that no sort of legitimate lure would, under existing conditions and circumstances, induce a fish to even look at, much less to rise to it.

The "Glorious Twelfth" dawned bright and warm. I was all agog for my first attack on the grouse; but we had a very stiff climb before reaching the shooting-ground. My hill legs and lungs were not yet in trim, so I was fairly blown and soaked with honest sweat by the time the first brace of setters—Don and Dinah—were put down. It was at once evident to me that these knew their work, and had been most thoroughly broken, for they worked to Grant's hand and whistle to perfection, and quartered their ground in masterly fashion.

Whilst shinning up the hillside, I had become aware that the hefty Collinson seemed to be determined that I should note the size of his shot as inscribed on the end wads of his cartridges as they rested in the breach of his barrels. In other words, he persistently carried his gun at full-cock (hammerless weapons had not been invented in those days), and carefully aligned for my cranium ; so, on my invariable " safety-first " principle, I sheered off and gave him a wide berth, despite his exhortations to " close up ! "

It was not long before both setters began railing to the wind, and soon Dinah was down ; Don backing her in exemplary fashion.

My " pard " motioned me to go forward, which, I trow, was very unselfish of him. I was wide on the right, and as I was closing in on the dogs, I ran right into another brood of seven grouse.

In my excitement I missed an easy shot with my first barrel, but popping in my second at a late riser, I had the satisfaction of seeing it crumple up. My first red-grouse !

Notwithstanding this rise and my two shots, Don and Dinah had not moved a muscle, so, having reloaded, I drew in on the right, with Hall on the left. The birds lay very close, and the bitch had to be stroked and encouraged to creep forward. At last a big bunch of some fourteen birds were sprung.

This time I made no mistake, for I " downed " a pretty right and left, whilst my companion did ditto. That day our bag amounted to forty-two brace ; which means a lot of shooting for only two guns when dogs are the order of the day. I never could have wished for a prettier or more enjoyable bit of shooting. Despite my pard's *avoirdupois* he was the deuce and all of a walker and a deadly shot.

For many days we had satisfactory bags. The third setter Dash and the pointer Sancho proved as good and reliable as Don and Dinah. What a pleasure it is to shoot grouse, or, for the matter of that, any other game birds, over thoroughly trained and broken dogs! To see them work, to my mind adds a hundred per cent. to the joy and excitement of shooting.

Of course, as time went on, birds became wilder and wilder, and began to pack; but for the first fortnight we averaged quite thirty brace per day. Our heaviest (third time out) fifty-three brace, which is the best, over dogs, I have ever participated in, where only two guns were concerned.

The time come when stalking was the order of the day. Collinson Hall was an old hand at the game; whilst Alec Grant had a great and well deserved reputation as a stalker.

My weapon was a Winchester repeater, not perhaps an ideal one for the job, but sufficient, given a fair chance. I was confident of my ability to hold straight and steady, and this I had demonstrated to Messrs. Hall and Grant—to their entire satisfaction and approval—on the counterfeit presentment of a stag which had been set up for shooting practice on the face of the hill opposite the lodge.

This sport, new to me, did not materialize until the last week of my stay.

The first day out, there was a thick mist which drove sharply over the corries and hill tops.

It was a longish climb before we arrived at the spot where active operations were to be put in force. An understrapper, known as Sandy (I have not the remotest idea what his other name might be) was told off, to take me along to Cairn Turk; whilst Hall and the faithful Grant, debouched to the left to scan some corries known to them as being an almost sure "find."

When nearing the plateau on the summit of the stately hill in question, I became aware of certain birds, of grouse size, which kept running over the boulders in front of us, perching on tops thereof, craning their necks and then taking short flights. They were in small coveys or bunches of three to five and showing a pretty grey and white colouring. I knew what they were—ptarmigan, of course! Here was a new species to add to my schedule of feathered victims. So I got busy!

The birds swarmed on the heights of Cairn Turk and Sandy had a strenuous time collecting the dead, which finally totted up twelve-and-a-half brace. The mist had now disappeared and the surrounding moors and tops stood out in all their glory of form and colour. I had forgotten all about our true and legitimate objective—stags; but as Sandy and I made our descent it occurred to me that we had not set out with the intention of collecting ptarmigan, but of possessing ourselves of a decorative head and, incidentally, of a welcome supply of venison. This was forcibly brought home to me when we met my lusty pard. I showed him my bag of "greys" with much pride; but instead of being impressed with my performance, he proceeded to read me the riot act in no measured terms. In fact, he was nearly apoplectic with hardly suppressed wrath.

"This is a nice game you've played me, Cox," he blustered. "What in Heaven's name induced you to open fire on those d—d ptarmigan? S'truth, you've sent every (*adjective*) stag scampering off the forest, and just as I was nicely placed for a safe pull, too! Confound it, man, you might have had better sense."

I was overwhelmed and felt utterly miserable. I cursed myself inwardly for my lack of understanding and thoughtlessness.

But my pard was a kind-hearted soul. He recognized that I had acted out of sheer ignorance.

"Never mind, my lad," he said, patting me paternally on the shoulder. "It was not *your* fault—how could *you* know?"

Then, turning to the shamefaced Sandy, his tone again changed and he let the vials of his wrath flow on the devoted head of the luckless Scot, in such a torrent, that the victim was reduced to a quivering jelly.

It has been ever a mystery to me why Sandy did not warn me of the sporting solecism which I was committing when indulging in a battue of ptarmigan in the middle of a deer forest! Perhaps he *owed his master one!*

My next endeavour at stag slaughter was supported by Grant and a ghillie of the name of Anderson.

Now it happens that Glencalater marches with the royal forest.

At the time I am dealing with, the old Queen Victoria was on the throne and was then in residence at Balmoral Castle.

A good story, but one which has only an indirect connection with sport, is told touching Her Majesty's visits to an old ex-servatrix of the Royal Household, who had been pensioned and established in a picturesque cabin on the further shores of Loch Calater.

It was the good Queen's custom to visit the old lady on a Sabbath afternoon, bringing her various delicacies and taking tea with her in homely fashion. In order to reach the cabin, Her Majesty was wont to be rowed across the loch by " a couple o' braw laddies." One day a distinguished traveller (possibly none other than " Pan " Gordon himself) was talking to Maggie Macfarlane (for such was the old crone's name) about the Queen's informal visits.

" I'm sure, Mrs. Macfarlane," he said, " you ought to be proud to think the Great Queen is so kind and friendly to you."

" Oo, ay," replied the old lady, " ah'm prood enow; bet ah dinna like Her-r Meejistee a rowin' a the loch o' the Sawbath'.'

" Oh, come," exclaimed the visitor. " Surely there's no great harm in that ? Why, have you forgotten that Our Lord rowed on the Sea of Galilee on the Sabbath ? "

" Oo ay—certes oor Lor-r'd ded ; bet foreby *ah n'ere thoct the better-r-r o' Him fer doin' it !* "

This by the way.

It was explained to me by Grant that one of the finest of the Royal herds was prone to cross the boundary just before dusk for the purpose of drinking at a small tarn, which was well within the limits of the Glencalater Forest.

With this fact in view, I was posted behind a convenient boulder, about fifty yards from the water, where, crouching in the high heather, I was well concealed.

Grant and Anderson then took cover on an adjacent hillock, where with their spy-glasses they could observe the approach of the deer; when they were to signal to me to be ready.

Time passed slowly. I had a fine opportunity of admiring the surrounding scenery and of noting the bird life, such as it was. I spotted a pair of ravens flopping about on a distant cliff, and then, casting my eyes skyward, fixed them on a great bird, high up in the heavens, and poised on wide spreading wings—a Golden Eagle! The first I had ever seen in its natural state.

Then a single hind and calf came down to drink; but I rightly concluded that this had nothing to do with the bunch which I hoped to deal with.

Whilst admiring the beauty and grace of mother and child, I became aware that Grant was signalling violently, but I could see nothing.

I kept my eyes steadily fixed on the sky-line of the hill in front of me; as I judged, about three hundred yards away.

Presently, in the fast approaching dusk, I made out shadowy forms passing along the brow in Indian file.

Surely it was the desired herd!

To my disgust the beasts went forward and made no attempt to approach the tarn.

Why were they not thirsty, as all good stags should be, at the end of a perfect day?

Matters were becoming desperate. It was a case of "now or never!" I adjusted my sights to three hundred yards and selecting a stag which appeared to carry a "royal" spread, took a steady aim and pulled; only to see my bullet plough up the ground under his shoulder and level with his fore slots. I had evidently miscalculated the range. D——!

Away scampered the rest of the bunch. I pumped in a long shot at the last of the fugitives without any visible effect.

At the same time, I heard a devil of a to-do and clattering of hoofs in my immediate rear. I whipped round and what was my amazement and horror on seeing the whole of the Royal herd, which must have been *within fifty yards of my "hide,"* but which now were scampering off pell mell. Oh, the pity of it!

Grant and Anderson were up on their hind legs, dancing, gesticulating and tearing their hair like a couple of maniacs. Even at that distance I could hear their uncomplimentary remarks. " Wee Sassenach fule " being the mildest of the objurgations which they heaped upon my devoted head.

But how was I to distinguish between the two contingents, or to guess that the genuine lot would approach *from my rear?*

Thinking it over afterwards, I came to the conclusion that Grant was the real villain of the piece and that his own calculations had been upset, otherwise, why place me as he did ?

This proved the beginning and the end of my deer-stalking experiences. I have yet to set foot on the prone form of the monarch of the glen.

It strikes me that my case was almost as sad as that of the gallant Count Fontainbleu, an enthusiastic Gallic sportsman who was invited by the owner of a prolific deer-forest (whom we will call Lord Gralloch) to try his hand and skill at stalking.

Overnight, the noble host, after dinner, and when the wine was going round and cigars were aglow ; called in Ronald Macalister, his very superior stalker, and thus addressed him :

" It is my infernal luck, Ronald, that I should sprain my ankle, just as the Count here arrives : but you must take him out over the best ground and see that he has a fair chance."

" Oo ay ! "

" Ah, my friend," put in the Count. " It is zure I am zat ze good MacTaveesh——"

" Ma name's no MacTavish, ye ken ! " This from the deer stalker.

" Ah, zat vas all a right, Mac. I call you MacTaveesh because eet zounds so—so—vat you zay ?—So Scottie ! "

Next day all was ready for a start, with Macalister garbed and accoutred for the fray.

The genial son of La Belle France slapped him on the back, exclaiming :

" Zy foot ees on zy native 'eath, zy name's MacTaveesh ! "

" Ma name's *no* MacTavish ! " reiterated the stalker.

In the evening, when the Count returned to the castle, he was beat to a frazzle and fed up with life in general and deer stalking in particular—devil a stag had he seen all day.

His lordship could not make it out. Day after day the same thing occurred, until at last Count Fontainbleu was reduced to a shadow; the soles of his boots were worn thin as blotting-paper, and his feet were grievously chapped and blistered. He threw up the sponge and made tracks for the South.

Lord Gralloch was left guessing.

He called in Macalister and interrogated him sternly:

"Why—what in Heaven's name has come to the forest since I have been laid up, Ronald? Are there *no* beasts left on it?"

"Oo ay, yere lordship. Foreby there's mony an' mony a bonnie beastie i' the corries."

"In the name of all that's wonderful, then, how is it that you have not even shown my esteemed friend, Count Fontainbleu, a stag?"

Then the murder was out.

"*My name's not MacTavish*!" exclaimed Macalister tersely—and turning on his heel he stalked majestically from the presence of his astounded and scandalized master.

CHAPTER XIII

BIBLE history fails to relate that the late Mr. Ananias was an angler; but we may presume that such was the case, and that his infantile efforts to pervert the truth led to his being quoted as a shocking example of the unregenerate liar. If such were indeed the case, we knights of gut and hook have good reason to deplore a precedent which has caused us one and all to be labelled (*I* maintain *libelled*) as irreclaimable manipulators of the harmless and sometimes necessary terminological inexactitude.

As for Sapphira, she would, of course, have been acquitted by any modern jury, on the grounds that she was under the malign influence and coercion of her superior moiety.

But it is certain that these tarradiddles often lead to a situation which may prove most embarrassing to the backslider. One such—a "Yank" be it said—had been wielding the "fish-pole" (a term by which his compatriots degrade and insult the split-cane, steel-centred fishing-rod, of superfine quality and efficiency. He was awaiting a connection with the Grand Trunk, at an inconspicuous wayside station, and having deposited his angling outfit by his side, was smoking the pipe of peace, when enter to him a stranger, who politely raised his hat; when the following dialogue took place:

Stranger (genially). "How'dy Bud! I figure you've bin fishin'. Had a lucky streak?"

Angler (removing his pipe from his lips and blowing azure rings of smoke into the ambient air). "I should smile! Just back from way down yonder, at the great Omaha lake. In four days, Boss, I laid on to four hundred and ninety-nine striped bass."

Stranger. "Why not say five hundred whilst you're about it, kiddo?"

Angler. " Sir ! I would not imperil my immortal soul, just for one dod-rotted bass—believe me. No, siree ! "

Stranger. " But how come it, Buddy, as you was ketchin' striped bass ? It's sure the close season fer them critturs ! I'm figuring you'se up agin a fine of a dollar a tail all round."

Angler. " Gee ! I kant help that, stranger. Them fishes was thar an' I was thar. I sure had to pull 'em out, right thar on the spot, close time or no close time ; but may I ask who may I be havin' the honour of addressin' ? "

Stranger. " Why, cer'nly ! *I'm the fishin' warden*. May I inquire where *you* hail from and what you are ? "

Angler (in a subdued voice). " As fer where I come from, let it pass. As to what I am ! I'm *figurin' to be the biggest liar* in the whol' of the U-nited States, and I'm all fer changing the conversation ! "

Which goes to illustrate my contention that vain boasting, which has not even the virtue of being founded on fact, is apt to overreach itself, and lay out its manipulator in boomerang fashion. But it sometimes happens that a thumping lie is used for the purpose of rebuking a similar lapse from the straight and narrow paths of truth—one scarcely less outrageous than itself. For instance, two Englishmen were holding forth anent their wonderful and quite unbelievable exploits in the gentle art of Walton, when an American, who had been " listening in " most sympathetically, joined issue.

" Say, gentlemen," he began, " you guys have seemingly had some fine adventures among the ' scaleys,' but I'm figurin' I can tell you a story what'll whip to a frazzle anything you have mentioned. It was this way : Me an' my pard, Joe K. Slosh, is dead nuts on the sea-fishin' proposition ; so we chartered a sloop and pegged down south-east of Blue Point about a mile out. We was usin' a chain cable for a line, and a two-ton anchor for a hook. When we had let down a hundred and forty fathoms there was a bite ! Gee ! *some bite* I'm tellin' you. The cable was run off the capstan with a h—— of a rattle. The sloop was pulled right out from her moorin's, and we was dragged four leagues out to sea. Then our fish began sinkin' deep, and we was in peril of bein' drawn down to the uttermost depths. There was nothin' for it but to cast loose the cable. Away went our fish with the whol' outfit! Now I'm speculatin' as to what manner of prehistoric monster this *was* what put it over us thus?"

"Oh," sneered one of the Englishmen, "I expect it was a whale!"

"I guess not," answered the Yank, reflectively. "See here now. *We was baitin' with whales!* Get me?"

Then there is the vainglorious lie told for the sake of the telling.

A case in point.

"Fishin' in British Columbia?" said Ten. B. Pincus, in answer to my query. "I should just say! Why, when I got right up to the big Fish Lake the whol' surface was a dimple with risin' beauties. I soon fixed up my pole and line, and began castin' full of hope; but nary a touch did I get at my 'butchers' and 'silver doctors.' I soon became wise to the fact that these fish was blowin' themselves out with the jumpin' grass-bugs, what kept droppin' on the water. So I got hold of one and fixed it on a Number Eight hook; but when I went to cast, the durned thing came unstuck and landed clear, where it was golloped up by a big fish right there, under my very nose, as it were.

"I was just figurin' out what my next procedure would be, when I cast my eye behind me and fixed it on one of them Cree Indians, smiling quite pleasant like. He snapped up a bug from the grass, and signed to me to sling him the hook. This I did; whereupon that redskin pulled a long hair from his flowin' locks and fixed up the bug to the hook, so I could cast without its becomin' detached. This worked the oracle all right, all right. I sure had a four-pounder first go. Havin' unfixed it, I flicked my line behind me again, and when the Indian whistled, cast forward, and immediately had another big fish a fightin' me! This went on until I was knee-deep in shimmerin' squirmin' steelheads. All of a sudden somethin' happened. Three times I cast without any reply, when I noticed there was no bug on the hook. I spun round sharp. Sir, that Redskin *was bald as a coot!*"

Yet another lie is when an angler is bent on pulling the leg of some unsophisticated mug.

I was once an honoured guest at the annual dinner of a certain illustrious angling society.

The president, in reply to the speech in which he had been toasted, told the following yarn:

"Strange things happen to anglers," he said. "There was the case of the enthusiast who, fishing *below* Marlow Lock, hooked a ten-pound pike. It happened that at the moment he was holding in his fist a golden sovereign (it was in those good old days when such pleasant coins of the realm were in free circulation), which he had been about to transfer to the horny hand of the fisherman, for the purpose of obtaining liquid refreshment from 'The Compleat Angler,' when the run in question occurred. In his excitement he dropped the glittering coin which, rebounding from the gunwale, fell into the water and went shimmering and glinting into the depths just as Mr. *Esox Lucius*, with a shake of his ponderous jaws, snapped himself free and disappeared. So the angler lost both his fish and his 'quid.'

"Now, mark you, he had been fishing *below the lock* on that occasion, but a few days later he decided to try his luck *above* it—hard by the weir.

"He had not been fishing long before he had a lovely run, and on striking, found himself fast in a good fish, which, on being landed, proved to be a pike of ten *and a quarter* pounds, in excellent condition.

"It was, in due course, handed to his cook for culinary purposes; when, on being gutted, what think you was found in its maw?"

"Why, the sovereign which your friend had lost below Marlow Lock, of course." This from a chorus of voices.

"Not on your life," corrected the speaker. "No! There was a half sovereign, nine shillings and sixpence in silver, two pence in bronze and A LOCK TICKET!"

There was a hearty guffaw from the guests assembled.

The president assumed a pained and reproachful expression.

"Perhaps you don't believe me?" he murmured sadly.

I rose to my feet.

"Indeed, sir, *I do!*" I exclaimed seriously. *I* can vouch for the truth of your story, for *I happen to be that same angler!*"

He lies best who lies last!

But, alas, occasionally there are told by certain anglers, wicked and deliberate lies, for the base purpose of obtaining a material advantage.

One such may discover some wonderfully prolific swim or pool inhabited by a multitude of fishes that have a healthy and accommodating appetite. In case this unlawfully commandeered preserve of his should be encroached upon by some other casual brother of the rod, who has obtained leave for "a day's fishing," but who is ignorant of the "lie" of the water, he goes out of his way to inform the luckless wight that that particular swim or pool is an altogether hopeless proposition.

Another, having extracted a grudging leave from a riparian owner, has a fine time, and lands a score of good trout; but only two moderate ones appear in his creel!

When the water bailiff comes up and asks him civilly if he has had any sport, he replies nonchalantly:

"Oh! not much I'm afraid. The wind is against it, and the water too thick. Now, if Lord Knowshoo would be kind enough to let me have another day, I might do better. Here's a dollar for you!"

"Thank 'ee kindly, sir," says the warden. "When I sees his Lordship I will tell him, and p'raps he will give 'ee another chance."

Now confession is said to be good for the soul, so I will unburden my mind of a very similar piece of iniquity, in which I was concerned, together with my old friend "Teddy" Maurice, excellent character-actor and first-rate all round sportsman. We were reclining one sultry afternoon in the highland heather, lazily puffing our "bruyères," and listening to the dulcet warbling of our mutual friend Durward Lely, of D'Oyley Carte and Gilbert and Sullivan fame, who was our companion for the nonce. Having finished his vocal recital he—who was, like ourselves, an enthusiastic fisherman—confided to us particulars of a wonderful day he had enjoyed on a certain lakelet which was situate on the demesne of one Andrew MacMush of Tinspoon (this was not the real name of the laird in question. For obvious reasons I have substituted a fictitious one).

"Do you think he would give *us* leave?" asked Teddy anxiously.

Lely shook his head.

"I doubt it," he said. "Andrew MacMush of Tinspoon is a dour old churl, and has an antipathy to strangers."

"There is no harm in trying," I put in. "I will write him a very polite note, and base my application on the strength of my position as vice-chairman of *The Field*."

Teddy agreed, and the dulcet Durward, wishing us luck, wended his way to his domestic hearth, whilst Teddy and I returned to Glenshee.

Next day, with the diplomatic note in my pocket, and our rods and other paraphernalia in the "Ma-chine," we jogged over to Tinspoon, and sent the missive in to the Laird, by the hand of his austere-looking butler.

Anon, that worthy returned with the pleasing information that "Tinspoon" himself would be graciously pleased to allow us to cast a fly on his water that very evening.

It was now late, and the shadows were lengthening, but a fish on the land is worth two in the water, so we hurried off to the lakelet, which lay about five hundred yards from the Manse. It was an irregular piece, with an islet in the middle, and was infested by a large concourse of domestic ducks and geese; consequently, the clarity of the water was not what we could have desired but we could see fish—and good ones, too—rising all among the feathered flocks, so we set to work, Teddy taking the south and I the north side. I affixed a medium sized "Wickham" as a dropper, with a fat "Coachman" as a stretcher. At once I espied a trout feeding freely on the lee of the islet. No sooner was I over him than he took boldly, and proved to be a nice fish of about a pound.

Whilst dealing with this customer, I saw that Teddy was busy with one, on the other side.

It was not long before I had a beauty of nearly two pounds, when Teddy came running round.

" Here, I say, Cockie," he exclaimed as he came up, " this will never do! We've struck El Dorado evidently. Let's knock off here and now. We will take a brace of fish " (he also had accounted for two nice ones,) " up to old MacMush, tell him we have had less than an hour's fishing and would be most grateful if he would allow us to come to-morrow and enjoy a whole day ? "

This seemed reasonable, so I agreed.

These tactics panned out all right, and the next day found us shoulder to shoulder descending the incline which led to this delightfully productive lakelet.

At first we strolled, then, as I increased my pace, my companion followed suit. At last our progression ended in a breakneck sprint between us for the best section of the water.

I won by the length of my rod !

It would serve no purpose to enter into details of that day's sport. It was wonderful ! We were catching these voracious *farios* off and on all day. My biggest was a beauty of three-and-a-quarter pounds, and I had many over two pounds. Teddy's tally was almost the equal of mine.

But oh ! he led me into a most disreputable course of action. He insisted on my laying out one miserable trout of about half-a-pound on my side of the lake, whilst he ostentatiously displayed a brace of unconsidered trifles whose combined weight was certainly short of twenty ounces, on his.

All the rest of our opulent spoils were carefully camouflaged in an adjoining ditch.

When the ghillie came on the scene Teddy showed him our " exhibits," with a sad shake of the head.

" Not much sport, MacNair," he said. " I suppose there *are* some decent fish here ! "

" Oo aye ! an' mony o' them ! Man, I hae' seen fush o' foor, aye, an' five poun taken fra heer ! "

" Do you think the Laird would give us another day ? "

" Na, ma Mannie, Tinspoon wud'na ; he himself is mighty par-teecular. Onny way, ye can speer, but Ah'm thenkin' it's na guid. Sae, I'll be speerin' ye guid nicht the noo, and thank ye kindly." (This last as I handed him half a sovereign.) And away he stalked.

Well, we had a fine catch to display at Glenshee that night. When laid out on a spacious tea-tray these bonny fishes were a sight for the gods. Greatly did they delight the eyes of our respective C.O.'s, whose minds were set on rations, for hitherto our provisions had proved somewhat monotonous, since "the Glorious Twelfth" was still a week ahead.

"Teddy," said I, that evening, as we sat over our pipes in my study, "that was a dirty trick we played on old MacMush!"

"Not a bit of it, Cockie," replied my sportive pal indignantly. "The old blighter does not fish himself. Those trout are no use to him. Lely and ourselves are the only ones he has ever permitted to cast a line on his muddy pond."

"All the more reason we should have shown our gratitude, instead of surreptitiously decimating his stock."

"Oh rats! He ought to be grateful! The water is overstocked; besides, the trout devour the food which should go to fatten his ducks and geese. His economical heart should greatly rejoice that we have saved the waste!"

I had to be content. It was no good crying over spilt milk.

My conscience tells me that I erred sadly.

But oh! what a day! And, certes, those stolen trout *did* taste sweet! in spite of the murky consistency of the Tinspoon water.

Nevertheless, I firmly refused to make further application to the despoiled Laird for the fishing of his astounding lakelet.

But Teddy, nothing daunted, added insult to injury, for he had the effrontery to ride over to Tinspoon on his bicycle in the hope of wangling yet another day out of the dour Scot; but all to no purpose. Whether the good MacNair had become wise to our deceit, and in spite of my *douceur* had "blown the gaff," or whether "Tinspoon" himself was just fed up with our importunities, who shall say! Anyway, Master Teddy met with a flat and uncompromising refusal, and returned to Glenshee a sadder, if not wiser, man.

When I asked him how he had fared, he replied laconically, with an expression common to those of his cult:

"I *got the bird,* old chap!"

CHAPTER XIV

I NOW approach one phase of my varied experiences, which may cause the cold eye of condemnation to be bent upon me; to wit, that which found me rather ardently occupied in the much discussed pastime of trap-shooting. I say advisedly " pastime," since its most enthusiastic supporters never for a moment looked upon it as a *sport*.

It was simply and solely a competition requiring hands, nerve and eye. One which is the finest training in the world for almost any kind of game shooting.

Those who profess to look upon this exercise as requiring a mere knack or trickiness to ensure success, and who affect to believe that the most distinguished of pigeon shots could never hold their own against the accepted cracks at the butts or the covert rises are, to use a vulgarism, " talking through their hats."

It has been my lot to mark all manner of gunning and I can assert, with assurance, that I have never yet come across a first-rate pigeon shot, who was not a deadly performer with the gun at any and every form of small game shooting. *Per contra*, I have frequently seen men with great reputations as " field " shots, who proved veritable " wash-outs " when their alleged skill was put to the test at the traps.

My pen has, times out of number, protested against the distinction drawn between the *sport* of " free shooting " and the *pastime* of pigeon competitions. When and where the question of cruelty arises such distinction is invidious and illogical in the extreme. I have pointed out that the ordinary pheasant battue (where a holocaust of feather is systematically arranged for; where the birds are methodically shepherded to fixed rises, and where a certain percentage escape sorely wounded) compares very unfavourably with a pigeon-shooting event. That is to say, on the score of humanity or the lack of it. A sounder argument in disfavour of pigeon shooting is that which deprecates the slaughter of living creatures as pawns in a game, which undoubtedly was carried on, in part, as a means of gambling.

The same objection might be, indeed has been, raised to coursing, as indulged in from its earliest days. The pigeon-shooter takes no delight in *the slaughter of pigeons*, but is keen on " flooring " the *one particular pigeon* which enables him to score a notch towards ultimately winning the pool or the cup—as the case may be—for which he is competing, or because its slaughter enables him to land the odds he has laid on himself. He simply regards the unfortunate bird as a means to an end—a selfish one, no doubt. *" Tant pis pour le pigeon ! "*

So it is with coursing.

The greyhound owner takes no delight in the death of a gallant hare as such, but he is desperately keen on seeing the quarry receive its quietus when his own dog obviously holds a winning balance.

The only difference is that the coursing man wagers on the efficiency of his *greyhound*, whereas the pigeon-shooter backs *his own* skill.

For the most part the antagonists of pigeon-shooting and coursing, on the grounds of their cruelty, are those who, being degenerates and quite unversed in all manly exercises and adventures, are keen on driving a wedge into the vitals of our national sports. Naturally enough, they attack the most vulnerable front, but hope to widen the rift by noisy and continuous ranting. They have succeeded in putting an end to the shooting of live birds from traps, and also have persuaded authority to ban the use of live bait to the angler (who, by the way, generally treats this puerile law with the contempt which it deserves). If minnows and other small fry are to be saved from the hook, what price the poor but somewhat offensive worm ? " What is sauce for the goose . . ." you know ! I have heard women—with the inconsistency so conspicuous as regards their sex—inveigh against " the horrible cruelty " of pigeon shooting.

I heard one who rated herself a first-rate, all-round sportswoman, skilled with both gun and rod, and who vaunted her exploits in the hunting field vaingloriously, giving a lurid description of the "blood-curdling and revolting" cruelty, as viewed from the terrace at Monte Carlo, what time the pigeon-shooting contests were in progress. Her diatribes might have borne some weight had she not, almost in the same breath, "given the show away" when, in relating her prowess in "the great run" with a certain Leicestershire pack, she *boasted* of how she had *ridden two horses to death* on that occasion. Is not a game and gallant horse of more value than a whole loft of pigeons?

Having indulged in these cursory remarks I must pass on to actualities; since these rambling reminiscences would be incomplete were I not to chronicle my experiences at the traps; for at one time I was bang in the thick of the game, and now and then contrived to distinguish myself to some extent.

Shortly after we had lost our beloved and blameless Dads, I was stricken with diphtheria. Luckily it was not a very virulent attack, so I was soon convalescent. This was in February, when the weather, as is often the case, in that inclement month, was simply appalling.

So taking the ever-ready Ted Jaquet with me, we set out for the Riviera. This was my first experience of "The Sunny South." I shall never forget my feelings of rapture when awakening after a night spent in the bunk of a *wagon-lit*, I drew up the blind.

We had left Old Blighty wrapped in a snowy shroud, with a keen north-east wind, making us shiver and wilt as it penetrated our thick fur coats, and found its way to our livers and our very marrow. Now, the train was at rest at a small station between Toulon and Cannes, prettily named "La Pauline." The little station bell was tinkling musically and continually, the sky was cloudless, the air balmy and the sunlight golden. Flowering geraniums climbed all over the palings, whilst the carefully laid-out beds displayed anemones, stocks, cyclamen and primula all florescent. In the background was an orange and lemon grove, the trees of which displayed their resplendent fruits in abundance. (*N.B.*—The blending gave me my idea for the first colours which I adopted (viz., orange; lemon sleeves and cap), when I became the proud possessor of a racehorse—of sorts. (Excuse this *banal* " aside.") Oh, what a transformation! What a tonic for a poor invalid (alleged)!

After spending a few days at Cannes and Nice, Ted and I drifted on to "Monte," as was only natural, considering that, at that time, I was but twenty-three years of age and Ted my junior by thirty-three months!

Nor is it strange that, having secured our billets at the Hôtel Beau Rivage and enjoyed an excellent *table d'hôte*, we should decide to make our way to the celebrated Casino. Having procured our "*cartes d'entrée*"—with some difficulty, be it said, seeing that *M. le Commissaire en chef* wanted a lot of persuading that my age really did exceed sixteen! (I was very small and youthful-looking in those days)—we passed through the sacred portals, over which should be inscribed: "Abandon hope all ye who enter here," and found ourselves in "the jaws of Hell!" We eagerly watched the game of roulette and soon "became wise to its intricacies."

After a careful investigation Ted drew me aside:

"This is a simple proposition, Oh, my Cockie!" he whispered. "I suppose it is all straight going. If so, one has only to wait for three '*rouges*' or three '*noirs*' to turn up, and then begin backing the other colour, doubling after each loss. The Zero is a negligible quantity." ("Is it?"—Author.)

"Why, yes, Bullpig" (Ted's pet name) "that seems reasonable. Suppose we have a dart."

And we did.

Moreover, would you believe it, good people? we won six hundred francs that sitting, and for four days following, playing continually, we added to our store, until we had banked over one hundred pounds with *a five-franc unit*, and a *hundred pound capital!*

It is almost incredible that, during the time we were amassing this desirable dross, not once did a run of more than *eight* on one colour occur, but such is a fact. "Novices luck" I suppose!

We became puffed up and so convinced that we had solved the problem of constant and certain gain on the tables, that we decided to throw our winnings into capital and *recommence with a louis unit.*

Fancy (poor innocent and ignorant lads that we were) our thinking to " break the Bank " by means of " *The Devil's Martingale !* " the most dangerous and hopeless of all the fatuous systems that ever have been exploited at Monte Carlo or any other gambling establishment. Well, we were soon undeceived.

" The third night came a frost—a killing frost,
And when we thought—good easy lads,
Our riches were up-mounting—nipped our hopes
And then we fell like others. We had ventured
To trust a system which proved but a bladder,
Till far beyond our depths, our high-blown pride
At length broke under us, and thus it left us
Weary and broke to worlds that would not hold us,
Vain pomp and glory of the Rooms we hate ye ! "
(With apologies to one William Shakespeare.)

A run of *ten* particularly sombre blacks put " paid " to our account and we left the precincts with our figurative tails between our legs, and harbouring thoughts of suicide—or the *viatique.*

But we had had a very fair run, and lots of excitement, for our money.

At any rate, we received better value for our outlay than had two young guardsmen whom I marked some years later. They were complete novices, and apparently wanted to cut a dash on the occasion of their first visit to " The Rooms." To this end they contrived a sort of confidence trick.

Said one to the other :

" I say, Algy, old sport. Let's surprise the natives ! Run along and put a ' *mille* ' note on black the other side of the cylinder, and I will plank a like bit of dough on red, on this section. It will give the jolly old croupiers confidence that we are men of substance."

Algy did as bidden.

Unfortunately for the youthful chasers of the bubble-reputation, *Zero turned up*, so that they *lost fifty per cent. of their stake*, and slunk off poorer, if wiser, lads !

Since my first visit to " Monte," I have haunted that demoralizing but fascinating spot on nineteen occasions. I have played almost every conceivable system on the tables with good, bad and indifferent results. Believe me, good my lords and ladies, there is nothing to it. There is no system which can be relied on to " break the bank "—even temporarily. On the other hand, there *are methods of play*—as distinguished from hard and fast *systems*—which offer the player a very good chance of a reasonable percentage of profit on capital risked.

After years of study, I evolved one such, which, for three seasons in succession, enabled me to spend a delightful winter on the Riviera, living like a fighting cock and thoroughly enjoying myself at the expense of the administration !—my capital being £300, and my average weekly profit £20. Then came the War !

It must be remembered that the Bank *always holds one chance in its favour*, and the longer the odds, the harder does that " commission " press !

But the punter has one invaluable asset :

He *can leave off or commence playing at will ;* whereas the Bank is there to be shot at—any old time ! Come profit or loss to the administration, the ball of Fate must spin !

I could fill a volume with my experiences at " The Tables," and the strange freaks of chance, both at roulette and *trente et quarante*, which have come under my observation from time to time ; but I must take a pull, for, in fancy, I can hear some luckless wight, who has persevered with my rambling reminiscences up to this point, mumbling to himself :

" Hold hard, good Master Cockie ! Here you are again, right off the line ! You set your pen to work on trap-shooting, and now you have left pigeons in favour of punters. Get a move on ! "

Patience, dear sir (or madam), I make reply. It was impossible to arrive at the subject in hand, and my initial connection therewith, without recalling this particular visit to " Monte " ; for it was during the occasion in question that I had my first glimpse of " *Le Tir aux pigeons.*" And surely I could not let it pass without touching lightly on the temple of " The Goddess of Chance ! "

But now—*je reviens à mes moutons.* The day before Ted and I arrived at the sacred (the word " sacred " may mean " sacrosanct," or it may signify " accursed "—take your choice !) spot, the *Grand Prix du Casino,* which ranks with trap-shooters as the Derby does with racing men—what one may term the blue ribbon of the blue rocks—had been brought to a successful conclusion with the victory of Harry Roberts, an Englishman born and bred.

We were glad to hear this, and when the successful shooter was pointed out to us in the rooms, we indulged in silent hero-worship.

It was not long before we were introduced to the victor, whose name had been already engraved on the marble slabs, among that of other " immortals " of many nations.

This same Harry Roberts was a " personality " ! Rugged of feature and careless in attire, he was full of *bonhomie,* and had evidently drunk deep of the milk of human kindness from his earliest infancy. He was a persistent and enthusiastic pigeon shot, always steady and reliable and sometimes brilliant. He was a confirmed gambler, but having an intimate knowledge of every move in connection with the pastime, he was able to more than pay his way. In fact, it was supposed that he made a very fair living by his skill as a shot and his acumen as a speculator. Despite the fact of his having the blood of thousands of innocent pigeons on his hands, he was a tender-hearted lover of all birds, beasts and fishes. He had studied their manners and customs meticulously, and had thus stored up a fund of knowledge and information which was unique. This love of the creatures of the wild would seem to provide a paradox ; but all good sportsmen will understand it as I did, for was I not tarred with the same brush ?

The artist who might be asked to draw a fancy portrait of a pigeon-shooter would probably depict him as a sort of monster, with the face of a Trotsky and a cloven hoof ; his long, cruel claws dripping with the blood of his victims ; but I can assure you that such a picture would be a gross libel on the cult, which, jointly and severally, was in the old days represented by some of the kindliest, gentlest and most courteous of cosmopolitan sportsmen. In fact, I, whose activities have been exploited in so many connections, if asked to name the group that most appealed to me as the ideal of what sportsmen and gentlemen should be, would, without hesitation, name my pigeon-shooting associates; and if further interrogated as to the pleasantest and least unbending of the foreign contingents, would bracket the Austrians and the Russians of the now almost exterminated aristocracy of their respective countries; but such a selection would be invidious, when, as was the case, I rubbed such amicable shoulders with the French, the Italians, the Belgians, the Dutch, the Spaniards and the Americans. This was before the cataclysm of 1914, and even then, with one or two exceptions, I did *not* tackle to the *Germans!*

But here I am, anticipating again! I apologize!

At the time when I first met Harry Roberts, I had recently taken up my duties as trustee and vice-chairman of the boards of management of *The Field*, and other journals and publications of our family group, as established by The Dads. My new friend had read some of my descriptive articles in "The Sportsman's Bible" (as *The Field* was regarded at that time) and had gathered that I was a keen and fairly efficient shot. So he urged me to try my hand at his favourite game.

Always ready for any fresh experience of the kind, and having an abnormal bump of combativeness—otherwise being possessed of the competitive spirit *in excelsis*—I readily fell in with his suggestion, though I declined his offer to, then and there, introduce me as a competitor to the Monte Carlo "*Tir aux pigeons*," being far too modest to make an exhibition of myself in front of the world's leading "cracks." On our return to our native shores, Ted and I, for the nonce, became too intent on marriage and giving in marriage to trouble ourselves about sports and pastimes; but having effected unions with two charming sisters (respectively), became so uxorious, for a space, that neither of us pursued our former bents until a long honeymoon had reduced us to our normal temperatures and temperaments, when happily our sporting aspirations and activities were reborn.

Just a year after our first appearance at "The Mount of

Charles," we again found ourselves on "The Beauty Spot of the Riviera," this time accompanied by our wives and a mutual brother-in-law. Then it was that I ventured to make a start to try my luck at "The Traps."

At that time there was a small pigeon ground outside Monaco, at Cap D'Ail, near the station of La Turbie. This was used chiefly for practising purposes and for private matches, though on Monte Carlo off days a programme was sometimes drawn up, and some modest but tasteful *objet d'art* offered for competition in the principal event on the card.

The inducements were not sufficient to attract "the knuts," but some of the less conspicuous shooters would avail themselves of the chance of picking up a prize in less exalted company.

Roberts took me here to see how I would shape. I had come provided with a twelve-bore pigeon gun, specially built for me by W. W. Greener. This was the first hammerless gun I had ever shot with.

The birds provided were not of first-class quality—in fact they were a decidedly "mixed lot"—but still an opportunity was afforded me to make myself familiar with the amenities and conventions of the game.

We arrived an hour before the time set down for the commencement of the official programme, as Roberts was anxious that I should have a dozen birds all to myself, just for practice. Well, I downed my first bird (a precious slow one, be it said) out of a trap, and only used one barrel in the doing. Going on, I grassed nine out of the twelve. Not so bad, considering that here and there quite a decent pigeon was released. When the small company had assembled, the order of the day was proceeded with. The first item was a "pool"—one louis, *one bird* (meaning, first miss out).

I killed five straight and divided with a Russian Grand Duke. So—as in the case of my racing under Rules—I scored at the first attempt, but it was a very modest achievement, and after all, only "a dead heat."

Now came the contest for the *objet d'art*. This was a very pretty silver epergne, which I longed to annex, that I might lay it at the feet of my "C.O."; but it was not to be!

Out of fifteen shooters, and when seven rounds had been accomplished, there were only three left standing and I was one of them.

The others were my friend Roberts (standing at the limit distance, thirty metres) and Prince Victor Dhuleep Singh, at twenty-two metres. My form being unknown, I had been placed on the regulation twenty-seven mark. The eighth round was commenced by Roberts. He refused to back himself.

Now I have always looked upon this good friend of mine as absolutely beyond reproach and above suspicion, and yet, how came it that he missed a comparatively easy bird with both barrels?

I am sorry it was so, and yet I could not help a kindly emotion, as I took up my position and called, " Are you ready? " followed by, " Pull! " I hit my bird—a rather sharp one—with both barrels, but it struggled on and topped the boundary. Victor got " an owl," and dashing it down within a yard of the trap, was declared the winner.

" Why did you miss that bird? " I asked of Roberts.

" Because, Cockie, I couldn't hit it! " was his cryptic answer, with which I had to rest content; but I felt convinced that a win by his pupil would have pleased him enormously!

After this, I made my début at the Great Tir itself and continued to shoot regularly. I divided a pool or two, but never touched one of the big prizes that season. Certainly, I did not disgrace myself, for my shooting was consistent and my average rather more than respectable.

For the first time, I shot in the *Grand Prix du Casino*. There was a very large entry and a thoroughly cosmopolitan one. Only two rounds were got through the first day. I managed to survive these, and started with two more kills on the second, but then I let a fast bird go; killed the next and muffling my seventh, which placed me *hors de tir;* so I retired gracefully and looked on.

I may here state that from first to last I competed nine times in this world-famous annual affair, and only once was within measurable distance of winning. On that occasion, I had killed ten birds straight and went up for my penultimate turn, full of hope and no little confidence; as the pigeons then being trapped were of inferior quality and offered an easy mark for any average shot who had his nerves well under control as I had.

Always, it has been a peculiarity of my disposition, that whilst *awaiting* any contest in which I have been engaged, I have felt in a highly nervous condition and have suffered the prick of " the needle " most disturbingly; but once the game is started, these tremors have evaporated and I have found myself as calm and steady as a rock. I have been in a state of abject funk, when awaiting in the paddock two words, " Mount, please ! " : but as soon as I have been swung into the saddle, I have cantered my gee to the post as care-free and jolly as a sand-boy; only to suffer a relapse when lining up. Then once more, when the flag fell and " off " was signalled, I was myself again, desperately intent on my chance of being first past the post !

The same thing has happened in athletic contests, where my own two legs had to do duty for a race-horse's four.

When fretting my hour as a mummer, and listening at the wings for my cue, I have experienced ultra-rapid palpitations, but once I had the footlights in front of me, I was chock-full of ease and confidence.

So it was, when awaiting my turn to face the traps. As soon as ever my foot was on the mark, I was utterly imperturbable.

On the momentous occasion with which I am now dealing: I had that cock-sure feeling which generally presages success; but as it so happened, my calculations were upset by the very conditions which, with better luck, should have made my eleventh bird a certainty.

When I cried " Pull " the centre trap (No. 3) came over and *the pigeon sat.* For the benefit of the uninitiated, I may explain that, in such case, the shooter has the option of having the " sitter " flushed by one of the " *tireurs* " who lobs a wooden ball at it for the purpose; or he (the shooter) *can call " No bird ! "* and have another. The latter course is, of course, the more sporting one, but I must frankly confess that though it was my invariable custom to call " No bird " when a confiding "rock" sat somnolently on the trap-plate, it was chiefly for reasons far apart from sportsmanship. I had learnt that—although one had the advantage of knowing the exact location of one's objective—if the "*tireur*" bowled pretty straight, the startled "pige" would often rise hurriedly and in its efforts to avoid the missile, twist like a particularly lively snipe, and cause one to mistime one's shot. So in this instance, as usual, after calling "No bird!" I returned to my mark and again inquiring "Are you ready?" gave the direction "Pull!"

This time No. 5 trap came over and again a confiding "sitter" baulked me.

A third time there was a repetition of this exasperating interlude—No. 2 trap! Thus there remained traps 1 and 4. which might, *or might not*, contain a similar sample. I had seen the secretary go over to Roberts (not Harry), the pigeon purveyor in charge, and give a direction which I might well guess at. I had no doubt it was an order *to trap a better class of bird!*

Next time my "Pull!" was followed by the collapse of No. 4 trap, and from this emerged one of the fastest rocks I have ever seen. It was like a streak of lightning, and flew as straight as a die the shortest way to the boundary. I was never quicker or more accurate. The centre of the charge of my first barrel caught the bird and crumpled it up like a ball; but alas, the impetus of its flight took it *over the low boundary* and into the sea, as dead as a door-nail. I had not the remotest chance of using my second, and even if I had, it could have been of no avail. Had I *winged* the bird only, it must have fallen in bounds; but, as it was, the very accuracy of my shot defeated itself!

Perhaps with this pigeon to my credit I might have managed another, and so tied with an Italian and a Belgian, who could boast of a clean score; and as these, in shooting off, were so nervous that each missed two birds following, I might conceivably have triumphed! As it was, the representative of Bella Italia just scraped one down, whilst the Flamand (or perhaps he was a Walloon) again let his bird escape unscathed. There were seven shooters besides myself, who, at the end of the eleventh round, had only one "zero" to their respective discredits. We agreed to save stakes, and then to shoot off for third prize. As regards myself, reaction had set in. The demonstrative condolences of my friends of all nations had left me unstrung, so it is hardly to be wondered at that I failed to stop my first bird in the ties, and so found myself no nearer to the top of the list than *equal fifth* with three others.

This is the nearest I ever went to winning "The Grand Prize" and having my name immortalized on a marble tablet in the historic enclosure.

But the next season I had a very cheery consolation, which bucked me up considerably.

Next to "*Le Grand Prix*" itself, ranked, in those days, *Le Grand Prix de Clôture,* which wound up the shooting concourse for the season.

This also was a two day shoot, and a *level distance affair.* Most of the "Cracks" stayed on to compete, and though the rank and file had drifted away to some extent, the "field" was generally a big one.

The distance was twenty-nine metres, one which I did not fancy myself at; especially when pitted against such an array of international talent; but I had been shooting in very fair form, so ventured to take three hundred-and-thirty louis to ten about my chance.

One of my compatriots, and a particular pal, was Jack Hayley (a fellow clubman of the now defunct but much regretted Raleigh), "a priceless old sport," as our modern youth would term him. He fancied himself not a little for this event, as he had been showing brilliant form all the season and, among other triumphs, had annexed the valuable "Prix de Monte Carlo."

He and I had a side bet of one hundred francs on the positions we should respectively hold at the finish. Much to my surprise and Jack's chagrin he missed his first pigeon.

Five birds were to be shot at on the first day and seven the second; two misses out. I "downed" my preliminary four all right, so sought repose, well satisfied; for the birds had been real "snipe" and had had a stiff "mistral" blowing from left to right to help them. There had been a surprising number of misses and some of the most fancied competitors were already "*hors de tir.*"

Matters went very well with me the next day; so by the time the eleventh round was concluded I *was the only one* of the distinguished field *that had killed all;* whilst only one (Jack Hayley, if you please!) had but a single zero posted to his debit.

Therefore, when my turn came in the final round I *had only to kill to win!*"

Only! But it was a big "*if*" with such birds and so much depending on the issue!

I forced my nerves into subjection, and as soon as I was on the mark I was the personification of steady determination.

Never before, or since, have I been so highly tried at a crisis. A perfect demon of a bird—released from the right-hand trap—was caught by the wind, and whirled off with meteoric speed. My first touched, but failed even to modify the pigeon's flight. My second followed instantaneously, and *the "rock" was down*, with his wing "gone"! Glory be!

But so near a thing was it, that, in falling, the luckless bird struck the wire barrier only a foot from the top. So I must account myself a very lucky guy to have annexed this important stake, together with the valuable and tasteful *objet d'art* that went with it, to say nothing of the useful bet which had clicked.

Jack Hayley had killed his twelfth, so was *proxime accessit.* I have hardly ever met him since, but he has wailed about that unfortunate first bird, which he suffered to start on what looked like a swift journey to Corsica.

"Look here, old Cockie," he is wont to say, "if I had not muffed Number One, I should have beaten your head off!"

Truly, there is much virtue in an "*If*"*!*

Every three years "*Le Championnat Triennal*" is held on the Monte Carlo ground, the conditions being twenty-five birds at twenty-nine metres, five birds out; *entrée, cinq cent francs.* I have tried my luck in this competition on two occasions. In the first, five "zeros" in fifteen rounds put an end to my chance; but the second endeavour saw me well in the running until the eighteenth. Then I struck a bad patch and went all to pieces. I missed three birds out of four; but, even so, came out seventh in the list.

"*Le Grand Prix de Clôture*" was the only really important win that I registered at "Monte," though I had a look in at a number of minor events and pools, whilst picking up some tasty trifles at Cannes, Mont Boron (Nice) and Cap D'Ail (La Turbie). It was at the first-named of these venues that I had a pleasant and interesting social experience. A good programme had been drawn up, but for some reason or other it failed to attract shooters from Nice and "Monte." When the hour arrived, only three others besides my brother-in-law, Ronald Barlow, and myself, assembled to "carry on." One was a tall, handsome and aristocratic Frenchman, the *beau-idéal* of the ancient *régime;* the others being his two sons, mere striplings then, but each possessing a marked personality of his own.

And who think you were the units of this trio? No others than Le Comte de Paris, the Duc d'Orléans and Prince Henri of the Bourbon ilk.

Ronald and I were formally introduced and most courteously met. A handicap was drawn up, and the "royalties" given every chance. I was "back marker"; but Ronald won the little event, standing at twenty-four metres, on the same mark as the Duke of Orleans.

Then we had a series of friendly matches, which resulted in honours being almost equally divided.

A propos royal blood, my pigeon-shooting ventures brought me into contact with several of the elect. I remember a visit paid to "Monte" by the late King Nicholas of Montenegro, a cheery and urbane soul, with whom I had many interesting chats, for he took great interest in the *Tir aux pigeons* amenities. He had not, at that time, attained the kingly rank, which was subsequently conferred upon him. He invited me to visit him at Cettinje, but I did not avail myself of his gracious offer of hospitality, though one who did so was that priceless prince of wit and humour, the late W. S. Gilbert, who gave me a most illuminating description of his visit to the comic-opera state of Montenegro. Poor, gallant

Montenegrins, they were continually fighting other people's battles as well as their own. If successful, they were invariably robbed of the fruits of victory, and when overwhelmed by the Austrian hordes, sank into nothingness, without eliciting a sign of gratitude from those whose cause they had so bravely and so long upheld!

Another notable royalty whom I chanced across was the gallant gentleman who afterwards became King Peter of Serbia. Before he was called to the throne of that long-suffering and distressful state he was living quietly in Paris, where at "*Le Cercle des Patineurs*" he used to amuse himself at the traps and indulge in a mild flutter on the chances. Here I often met him in friendly rivalry, and on one occasion had a match with him at twelve pigeons, of which he accounted for seven, whilst I (owing three metres) managed to grass ten, and so pocketed the future king's five hundred francs!

During my frequent visits to "Monte" and its *Tir aux pigeons*, I had a great penchant for arranging matches with those shooters whose form approximated to my own, or with lesser lights to whom I had to concede a metre or two. I think I was much more convincing as a match shooter than as a competitor in official events. In fact, I can only recall one instance in which I was beaten. But the first time I essayed this form of contest I was in deadly peril of defeat through an unlooked-for cause. If I remember rightly, my opponent was Welbore Ellis, a very consistent Gun Club exponent of the art. You will remember that when I made my *début* at "Monte," I had brought with me a twelve-bore Greener hammerless (then something of a novelty).

When the match (twenty-five pigeons at twenty-seven metres) began, I was the first to shoot.

To my surprise and annoyance, *both barrels went off at once;* and though my pigeon was pulverized, the umpire, very properly, called "No bird!" So I had another go, and the same thing occurred. A third essay was no more satisfactory.

This was distressing alike to my nerve, my head and my shoulder. Obviously something had gone wrong with the works!

A friend lent me his hammer gun, and as its bend did not suit me in the least, and as it was decidedly too long in the stock for my very short arms, I promptly missed two birds in succession; meanwhile my opponent had scored two kills.

Then I resumed my own weapon and *tried firing the left barrel first*, with the satisfactory result that its discharges were normal. To cut a long story short, I got up, as it were, on the post, to *win by one bird!* A narrow squeak, indeed!

Ever since then I have invariably *shot with the left barrel first*, whether at pigeons or game!

But in the following summer, when shooting at the Gun Club, an incident happened which induced me to abandon the "*hammerless*" for good and all, and to return to the more primitive type of weapon. I had to kill to win an important prize, and waltzed up to the mark quite gaily. When I called "Pull!" a very moderate specimen of the blue rock gave me an easy chance; but my pressure on the trigger failed to meet with the ensuing explosion!

I had forgotten to pull back the safety bolt! I was defeated!

As regards unlucky incidents, I had a most exasperating experience at that same Gun Club.

As in the former instance, it devolved upon me to "kill to win" a very handsome cup and substantial stakes.

I had an easy bird, timed it beautifully, and, as I thought, dropped it stone dead within three yards of the trap. I was turning round to re-seek the pavilion in triumph, when a friend who had backed me for the event and who stood to win "a packet," shouted out: "Go on, Cockie; give him another to make sure!—*Assurez la masse!*" There lay my bird, motionless, with its wings outstretched on either side of it. Taking the hint, I plugged in my right.

Now this bird must have been "playing possum," for instead of my shot causing it to be "still dead," it acted as a corpse reviver, since the wretched pigeon pulled itself together, rose gracefully from the ground, and sailed away over the boundary—though lost to sight, to memory accursed! Again I met with defeat, for I was ignominiously knocked out in the "ties."

Hark back to Monte Carlo.

During two seasons I had the honour to represent The British Empire on " The International Committee," my colleague on the first occasion being the Earl of Carnarvon. As far as I can remember, our duties were not particularly onerous, though the said committee met once a week and indulged in a babel of polyglot tongues; but there was a roster from which the umpires were drawn in rotation. It happened that my turn came during the competition for *Le Grand Prix*. At that time there was a novice competing whose form was consistent, if not brilliant. He had been very lightly handicapped in preceding events and had shown a very steady average. For some reason or other, I had a strong idea that he would have something to do with the finish of the great event—and so it turned out. Luckily for him, he never had a really top-notch bird to try him out, but he " downed " his quota in masterly style—cleanly and accurately.

This was Jesse Curling, a cheery and modest sportsman, with whom I struck up a close friendship which has survived the passage of many years, though nowadays it is only occasionally that I run across him and his charming wife. At the time, his victory in *Le Grand Prix* was looked upon as something of a fluke; but subsequently, at various English and Continental gatherings, Jesse proved that such was by no manner of means the case, for he carried off some of the choicest plums of the pigeon-shooting world.

My attendance at the Gun Club—then located near Wormwood Scrubs (" You ought to have been in another establishment close by," I can hear the self-styled humanitarians exclaim)—was pretty regular during summer time (in the autumn and winter months I was, during those years, too busy with my hounds and my racehorses to find time for pigeons and prizes). I had been elected to the club, and also to Hurlingham, on returning from my second visit to the Riviera. At the former resort I was placed on the twenty-seven yards mark; this being a distance that suited me to a nicety, I scooped in one or two desirable " cup events " and had a fair share of pool divisions.

At Hurlingham, I began at twenty-five yards, and although

I held my own pretty well, I was not so successful as at the more open and business-like Gun Club.

It was also my wont to repair to the grounds of the Welsh Harp, Hendon, there to shoot for the valuable prize annually offered (under the auspices of Mr. H. Holt) by "The Gun and Polo Club." This trophy was named "The Grand Aristocratic Cup," valued at fifty-two guineas, added to a sweepstake of five pounds each. Fifteen birds; handicap distances.

I had the luck to win this desirable prize *two years running*, and, curiously enough, under exactly similar circumstances. On the first occasion, I was handicapped at twenty-six yards. I killed all seven birds on the first day; missed my first on the second, and yet *had only to kill to win* at the finish. The next year I was put back to twenty-eight yards. Otherwise the course of events was identical!

Later on, another valuable competition—The Portland Cup—was offered by Mr. Holt at Hendon. H. T. Bentley, who had been closely associated with me in pony racing,* and who was an associate of mine at Hurlingham, tied with me at the finish. I was at twenty-nine, and he at thirty yards' rise. This was the first time I had shot with Ballastite powder. Not being used to such a quick explosive I began to suffer from gun-headache by the time we had reached the ninth round. This infliction increased in severity every time I faced the traps.

Bentley and I were the only ones left standing when we had eleven pigeons "straight" credited to our respective names. Then we killed bird for bird up to seventeen.

Long ere this, I was in agony and almost on the point of collapse. I did not care if I missed! I only longed to be quit of the distressing business. But, somehow or other, I kept scraping down my birds with my "second."

At last, after the nineteenth kill by Bentley, I did manage to let one go, and was unfeignedly thankful; though the cup was a very handsome one. We had agreed to divide stakes when the tie was declared, and had then shot out for the trophy.

I was now really ill and in dreadful pain and distress. My friend, General Willoughby, took me home in his dog-cart, and had to hold me in with one arm, whilst he drove his smart cob with the other. On arriving at my home in South Audley Street, my C.O. put me to bed and sent for the doctor, who gave me an effectual emetic, which worked wonders.

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* See "Chasing and Racing."

In a couple of days I was myself again, but no more Ballastite for your Uncle Cockie, thank you!

I reached the zenith of my triumphs, such as they were, in the International Concourse at the Gun Club and Hurlingham in the summer of 1883.

This annual gala was divided between the two clubs; shooting taking place at each enclosure on alternate days throughout the week; the whole programme culminating on the Saturday with the contest for "The Grand International Cup," value two hundred and fifty pounds, added to a sweepstake of five pounds each.

This was a handicap. At that time my official distance was twenty-five yards. I would not take advantage of this leniency, but elected to toe the twenty-seven mark.

"What gross conceit!" you will say.

Not at all! The fact is that, for some occult reason, my average at any distance nearer than twenty-six yards was deplorable, whilst at twenty-nine or over I was uncertain and inaccurate; but at twenty-seven and twenty-eight yards I was at my best—such as that best was.

I suppose that the latter distances suited my eye and "timing," whilst longer or shorter ones found me guessing, and either "snapping" or "poking," as the case might be. This was not as it should be with one who held some sort of reputation as a game shot—but so it was!

Incidentally, I may mention that one season at Hurlingham I had been shooting so moderately that Aubrey "Jack" Coventry handicapped me at twenty-three yards, at which there was a general outcry among the other shooters; but though I provided myself with a pair of cylinder barrels and used No. 7 shot, I conspicuously failed to make even a respectable showing. So I voluntarily receded to twenty-seven yards and signalized my retreat by winning or dividing every event on the day's card, and not missing a single bird from start to finish; wherein I established a personal record —*thirty-seven pigeons straight;* my next best being twenty-nine at Mont Boron (Nice).

To return to the International week, 1883. I had been in excellent form of late and made a good start on the Monday (Gun Club) by winning Third Prize in "The Paris Cup."

The next day, at Hurlingham, I was well in the running for the principal event, but just failed to gain a place.

On the Wednesday (Gun Club again) I divided the preliminary pool (even thirty yards), and scored nine birds in the Cup.

I continued to keep up an excellent average all the week, so when it came to the great contest on the Saturday I was quietly fancied by some of the most astute backers, and substantially supported at 30 to 1—long odds from a horse-racing point of view, but not so in a contest of the kind toward.

I myself secured £300 to £10, and arranged with a friend to lay £30 to £10 *on* me every time I went to the mark.

There were seventy-four shooters, including most of the Continental and American "cracks." The Cup was a most beautiful specimen of the silversmith's art, and on it I cast longing eyes. Whilst doing so, an Anglo-Cuban friend of mine, Alfonzo Jiminez (afterwards Marquis di Granja), one of the roundest, rosiest and jolliest little sports as ever was, handed me a sealed envelope, saying:

"Here, Cockie, open this when the contest is over. It is my prophecy of the result."

I put it in my pocket and forgot all about it for the nonce.

Then the first man on the list was called up by good Mr. Turner, the scorer, whilst Arthur Badcock, our secretary, took up his position as umpire.

There was a sharp wind blowing right across the traps, from right to left. This was just what I wanted. It suited my swing and time to a tick; for I had always put in my best performances under such conditions, whereas the "left to right" swing had invariably found me wanting.

Whilst awaiting my turn, Tom Gambier, an old club friend and highly astute sportsman, who had gathered unto himself all there is to know about pigeon-shooting, drew me aside.

"Who is handing you your cartridges, Cockie?" he inquired.

I told him.

"Ask no questions," he continued. "Take these" (handing me twenty-five "shells") "and put them in your pocket. I have backed you to win me a good stake."

"My dear chap, whatever for? My chance is a remote one, and, pray, what is the magic effect of these cartridges you have given me?"

"I told you not to ask questions." And Gambier turned on his heel, leaving me guessing.

I examined the wonderful "shells." They were exactly like those which I had handed to the attendant to serve out to me, two at a time, as I went to my mark.

E.C. powder; 7 and 5/6 shot.

Now I knew Gambier well, and had the greatest faith in his acumen; so I made no further ado, but, acting on his instructions, took the cartridges handed me by the attendant, slipped them into my trousers pocket, and substituted for them two of those provided by my friend.

The birds, which proved of the finest quality, had been coming out at express speed, and, being caught by the wind, were swept at an amazing rate of speed right across the ground. I was a trifle behind my initial pigeon (a snorter from the left corner trap) with my first barrel, but, swinging well forward, dropped it dead, almost on top of the trap *on the extreme right*.

Well, once more to cut a long story short, I kept up my form, and though I had to use my second rather frequently, I never looked like letting a bird go.

The conditions were "one bird." That is to say, each shooter, as he missed, was automatically knocked out; so the contest resolved itself into a demonstration of "the survival of the fittest."

The extraordinary flight of the birds was playing havoc with "the talent." The fielders were having the time of their lives and picking up a small fortune; but there was another shooter who seemed to be well favoured by the peculiar conditions.

This was Captain Shelley, an old and tried hand at the game; for he kept grassing his birds in fine style.

At the end of the twelfth round, there were only two others, besides Shelley and myself left in. One of these was " Papa " Journu, the great French shot, the hero of countless classical contests (including the winning of the Grand Prix du Casino, Monte Carlo). I forget who the fourth was, but have an idea it was Captain " Bummer " Leighton, another old hand, and a very tough opponent at any time and under any conditions.

If it was, indeed, that same " Bummer," he let his thirteenth bird slip, whilst the great Journu was defeated by his fifteenth.

Thus the contest resolved itself into a tie between Shelley and myself. Excitement rose to fever heat !

My turn came before that of my opponent (a great advantage in a tie). I dropped my bird all right, and Shelley did likewise. I had a meteoric " rock " for my next—missed clean with my left, but nailed the " rock " promptly with my right, swinging a good seven yards in front of it.

The gallant captain was served with a similar pigeon, which he peppered slightly with both barrels ; but it was a strong and game bird. *With the wind to help it, it topped the wall !* Glory be !

There was a yell of pent-up excitement as the tension was relaxed. I was seized and carried back to the Pavilion shoulder-high !

Corks began to pop and wine to fizz and sparkle, whilst my right hand was nearly reduced to a pulp !

When the excitement had cooled down a bit Jiminez came up to me.

" Well, what did I tell you ? " he beamed.

" As how, Jimmie ? " I asked.

" Why, haven't you opened the envelope I gave you ? "

" Lord, no ; I forgot all about it ! "

So saying I produced the document and tore open the cover. Within was a half-sheet of Club paper, on which was written in bold characters :

RESULT OF INTERNATIONAL CUP

HARDING COX	1
Journu	2
Turner-Turner	3

So my Cuban friend had spotted *two out of the three* placed in a field of seventy-four shooters!

"Marvellous!" I exclaimed. "Are you a clairvoyant, Jimmie? What on earth made you select *me* as the probable winner?"

"Because, my Cockie," he replied, "I have carefully noted your form, and how a wind such as we have to-day suits your style. Journu is always there or thereabouts, and Turner-Turner does not give the birds time to benefit by the breeze. See!"

Reasonable enough; but, faith, it *was* good picking sure-ly!

So here was I overtaking ambition at a bound; for next to the Monte Carlo "Blue Ribbon," "The International Cup" was supreme El Dorado of the pigeon-shooter who places glory before pelf; though, for the matter of that, there was considerable dross involved in the winning of the latter.

On this occasion I increased my bank balance by close on a "monkey," as well as becoming the proud possessor of the most highly and artistically wrought piece of plate that had ever been offered for the event in question. Of course I had a go at the even distance (thirty yards) affair which followed, and actually succeeded in accounting for four birds before, at last, my sequence of kills was broken, and then there were only five others left in!

I have been always very proud of this win. I think I have a right to be; but, as a matter of fact, my victory in "*Le Grand Prix de Clôture*" at Monte Carlo was a far greater tribute to my skill; for in the latter event I was competing *on even terms* with some of the world's greatest shots, whereas the "International" was a *handicap*, and some of the "cracks" were conceding me from five to eight yards on the official list, and from three to six as regards the actual mark from which I chose to shoot!

CHAPTER XV

MEANWHILE I had been shooting steadily at Hurlingham on the alternate days. In one of the "star" events I annexed third prize with nine kills straight, and divided one of the even distance pools.

It was at the Raleigh Club the next day that I ran across my friend Gambier.

"Now," said I, "what's all this mystery about my cartridges? Yours certainly did the trick all right, and I am profoundly grateful—but what about it?"

"I would not give the show away before," said my friend, "for fear you might get the wind up; but I have been watching your shooting for some time past, and I always back you, because you account for a nice average of *good* birds, and *never miss an easy one.* You have been at the top of your form all this week. I am not the only one who has spotted the fact, for I could name a dozen of the cleverest backers who, like myself, bet on your every shot.

"Now the day before the International I tumbled to some very dirty work that was going on in the *professional* ring. The pencillers asked for 7 to 2 and 4 to 1 *on* your *first two* shots (you *might* have missed, of course). When it came to the *third round* they began shouting that they would take the same odds, and *ended by accepting* 5 *to* 4 *!!* You were shooting steadily enough, and had killed your birds cleanly. Why, then, should 'the Ring' accept absurd odds under the circumstances? Wait! Your third bird was an easy one, and you seemed to pepper it with both barrels; but to everyone's surprise, including, I expect, your own, the pigeon passed the boundary but little the worse. Mark you, Cockie, I had seen this thing happen before when you were shooting in ordinary contests. *Now* do you see why I acted as I did?"

" You mean ? "

" Yes ! That the attendant had been bribed by the bookies to hand you dud cartridges—probably loaded with steel filings; since clouds of feathers were chipped out of your pigeon without the stuff penetrating."

This gave me furiously to think.

I offered Gambier my grateful thanks, and henceforth was on the *qui vive !*

" All's well that ends well," is a comforting proverb ; but my friend's revelation caused me much uneasiness. The fact is, that the Gun Club and some others made a fatal mistake in admitting professional bookmakers to their enclosures. Some of these pencillers were as honest as the day, and quite above suspicion ; but—*there were others ! Verb. sap. !*

Far better had the committees of these clubs followed the example of aristocratic and exclusive Hurlingham, and shut the door against professional bookies. There were plenty of *members* of these other clubs who were ever ready to take odds, instead of laying them, or to " hedge and ditch ! "

It was such shady practices as revealed by Gambier that afforded a handle by which the spoil-sports might twist their arguments against the pastime of pigeon shooting !

When the scores were totted up at the end of the International week, to my surprise and delight I found myself the winner of the Cup presented by the Gun Club *for the best average* of the whole series ; whilst at Hurlingham I was *proxime accessit* to my old friend Day, who shot under the *nom de tir* of " Mr. Grace."

The following were my averages :

Gun Club	7·75
Hurlingham	7·25
At the two Clubs combined...	7·50

A great, little friend of mine, Alan Robinson, whom I had met when on his honeymoon at " Monte," had taken up pigeon shooting because, like myself, he had something of a private reputation as a game shot. He soon made good, and began raking in the plums. His success was all the more to his credit seeing that he had but one eye, having lost the left optic when a lad of nine years. It seems he was watching some workmen as they were chipping iron railings. A splinter of the metal penetrated, as it was thought, the lid only. The poor little lad suffered hardly any pain or inconvenience at the time, but a few weeks later he began to experience dreadful tortures. He was taken to a celebrated Parisian oculist, who found that the iron splinter had, in fact, penetrated the ball of the eye, and lodged at its base, and that, as acute inflammation had supervened, there was nothing for it but the removal of the eye itself, and the insertion of a glass substitute.

When I first met "Bizzy"—as we were wont to call him—he was about twenty-four years of age, and had just come into a nice little inheritance, represented by a capital sum in spot cash. So he and his charming wife were intent on getting all they could of enjoyment out of life, on the *carpe diem* principle—one which I myself have followed religiously, and which legend I adopted as my personal motto in place of the ancestral one: "*Onward, upward!*" After all, when you come to think of it, the second is—or should be—the corollary to the first. And so it was that he and I, and his and mine, formed a hegemony of friendship which lasted many years, and brought much joy to the *partie carré!*

This was long after my triumph in the International week of 1883.

I had dropped pigeon shooting for a very long interval, but took it up again when my hunting days were over. I found that my form, such as it was, had not fatally deteriorated, whilst "Bizzy" was making a steady mark as a "classy" shot.

Just for sport, he and I issued a challenge to pit ourselves in a "foursome" against any two shooters from any country, whether of the same or of mixed nationalities—a piece of colossal cheek, which should have brought a well-merited snub on our devoted heads.

But, strange to say, none seemed to care to take up the gauntlet in a hurry. At last two foreigners did so. These were the Spanish Count O'Brien (sounds more like a "Paddy," doesn't it ?), who afterwards won the Grand Prix de Casino, and thus became an "Immortal," and "Bobby" Boreel, a genuine and hearty Dutchman, who, as a sportsman, out-Britoned the most enthusiastic Britisher!

It was arranged to shoot at a hundred birds (twenty-five each corner) at twenty-eight metres. I agreed to this readily enough, as my long-distance shooting had by this time greatly improved.

The match was decided at "*Le Cercle des Patineurs*," in the Bois de Boulogne, Paris. It was a close struggle, and although the birds had been specially selected, and were therefore of A1 quality, precious few lived to coo the tale in the pigeon loft.

This was the result:

Capt. Harding Cox	(Great Britain)	23 out of 25	44 out of 50
E. Alan Robinson	,,	21 ,, ,,	
Count O'Brien	(Spain)	22 ,, ,,	43 out of 50
Jonkeer R. Boreel	(Holland)	21 ,, ,,	

The closeness of the contest encouraged our opponents to challenge us to a return match. It came off a few days later, and this is how it panned out:

E. Alan Robinson	(Great Britain)	22 out of 25	43 out of 50
Capt. Harding Cox	,,	21 ,, ,,	
Count O'Brien	(Spain)	21 ,, ,,	41 out of 50
Jonkeer R. Boreel	(Holland)	20 ,, ,,	

So, on the second occasion, Bizzy and I slightly increased our lead.

Our challenge remained open, but there was no further response.

This has always puzzled me, since I am confident that any country could have found a brace of pigeon shots who would have simply "knocked spots out of us;" whilst dozens of mixed combinations could have beaten us to a frazzle, and so lowered our inordinate vanity and conceit. *A propos* Bizzy Robinson and his one and only effective eye, an incident occurred which was grimly humorous, though it may appear rather *banal* in the telling.

It was our custom each morning, whilst the Robinsons were guests of mine at "*La Villa Léontine*," Monte Carlo, for Bizzy and I to repair to *La Salle des Bains*, at the Condamine, there to indulge in a plunge in the salt-water swimming bath, which though of very limited surface area, was quite twelve feet deep.

On one occasion my auburn-haired friend was the first to indulge in his "header." As he regained the steps he scrambled out hurriedly with his hand clapped closely to the spot usually occupied by the counterfeit presentment of the human optic.

"Cockie! Cockie!" he wailed miserably. "*I've lost my eye!*"

"All right, Biz. Keep your hair on. I'll soon retrieve it."

So saying, I approached the bath and looked down into its crystal-clear depths. There lay the derelict eye on the tiled bottom, staring up at me with such a comical expression that I burst out laughing, and called its owner to share my merriment. He had been quite disgruntled, but the humour of the situation proving irresistible, he joined heartily in my mirth.

"Go on, Cockie; get it quick, there's a good chap!"

Down, down, I went, and soon had that dreadful staring eye safely clutched. When I returned it to its owner, he popped it into the vacant socket with incredible rapidity. Evidently practice had made perfect.

* * * * * * *

It was during one of my later visits to the Riviera that friend Day introduced me to one Baron Brebner, an Austrian Minister of rank, who had been deputed by his chief, the distinguished and highly intellectual diplomat, M. Ch. de Kalay (at that time Governor of Bosnia-Herzgovina and Minister of the Interior at Vienna), to make the acquaintance of the leading lights of the shooting world, and to invite them, in the name of the Austrian Government, to a great International concourse which was to be held the following autumn at Ilidji, near Sarajevo (where you will remember in July, 1914, the first spark was laid to the fuse which was to ignite the fires of Armageddon). The Baron was a charming fellow and possessed of a beautiful and equally charming wife. Both of them spoke English perfectly.

The former drew me into conversation, and then unburdened his soul of a proposition which was of wider import than the then popular pastime of trap-shooting.

" Captain Cox," he began, " your reputation as an ichthyologist and pisciculturalist, as well as that of a practical angler, has long been recognized in my country. M. de Kalay is anxious to exploit the sporting possibilities of Bosnia.. We have established fish-hatcheries at the source of the Bosna river, and have already started operations which we hope will lead to the stocking of that and other rivers of the province with various species of trout. I am deputed to invite you, not only to take part in our pigeon-shooting contests, but also to inspect and report on our piscatorial ventures. Every facility will be afforded you, and I think we can promise you ' a good time,' as you say."

Of course I expressed my appreciation of this offer. I told him that I felt highly flattered thereby, and that, all being well, he might count on me when the time arrived. All *was* well, so that the autumn found me with my dear pal, Ted Jaquet—who accompanied me as travelling companion—to the sulphur springs of Ilidji.

I had been looking forward to meeting the distinguished De Kalay, but unfortunately he had been recalled to Vienna on urgent business of the State, and though he hoped to get back to Bosnia during the sporting gala, he was not—as it turned out—able to do so; therefore he had to leave all arrangements in the hands of his *aide-de-camp*, Baron Brebner, as *chargé d'affaires*, and right well did the latter carry out his duties; moreover, Mme. de Kalay and her two charming daughters remained at Ilidji to entertain all and sundry who had been bidden to the concourse.

With Colonel Boswell-Preston as my colleague, I was elected to represent Great Britain on the International Committee.

I may at once admit that I by no means distinguished myself at the traps. In fact, the best I could do was to divide second and third prizes in the *Consolation Stakes* which wound up the meeting! I am unable to account for my wretched display, unless it was because my thoughts were so concentrated on trout, that pigeons and their slaughter became quite a secondary consideration. None can hope for success in any sport or pastime unless his whole attention is set on accomplishment.

This, too, was about the last time I faced the traps intent on a pastime which at one time had held a strange fascination for me. It was an ignoble finish to a career in that particular line which, on occasion, had been illuminated by many important triumphs.

But here let me point out to you that I have dealt only with those contests in which I distinguished myself, or was within an ace of so doing. I have made no mention of the hundreds of competitions wherein I cut an altogether inconspicuous figure.

You might imagine, from what I have set down, that I was a sort of super-shot in a class by myself.

Such was assuredly not the case, as proved by the fact that my most severe handicap during the years I was competing was twenty-eight yards in England, and twenty-seven metres abroad!

Had I shot sufficiently well to justify the handicappers in placing me at *thirty-two yards* and *twenty-nine metres* respectively I trow I should have cut a sorry figure indeed at those distances.

The fact is, I was essentially " a *middle-distance man* " *only*, and at that I think I may fairly claim to have made good; but I certainly could not be classed with the real flyers at the game—either native or foreign.

People may say what they like about pigeon-shooting and its alleged cruelty and degrading associations, but I could supply a list containing the names of some of the most kindly, courteous and humane men of the world—*gentlemen* and sportsmen in the best sense of the word, born and bred, who were, during my time, enthusiastic supporters of the game. Perhaps the gambling that went on among a certain section was to be deprecated, but the spirit of speculation is inherent, and one could not help regarding with wonderment and awe the nerve of some of those who would wager a year's army pay on a single shot. I remember one occasion at Monte Carlo, when Sir John (" Johnny ") Willoughby took it into his head to " slam " the takers of odds. He was a smallish, slim young man at the time, with an utterly imperturbable disposition.

He was a good, but by no means brilliant shot. As he strolled up to his mark with a big cigar between his lips during an ordinary pool, one of the leviathans of the Ring—Besnard by name—called out :

" Want to back yourself, Sir John ? "

" Yes ! What'll you take ? "

" Take you £70 to £40, Sir John."

" Yes ! Twice, if you like ! "

" You're on ! " (A pause.) " Look here, Sir John," challenged the bookie, probably out of bravado. " Tell you what I'll do with you. I'll take you £600 to £400, *if you don't put your cigar down !* "

Johnny's face was impassive ; not a muscle moved.

" Right ! " he said quietly. " And as much again, if you like."

The bookie was " snail-shy," and drew in his horns.

" No, thank you, Sir John," he muttered. " I'm full up ! "

The shooter raised his gun and drawled out :

" Are you ready ? " followed by the orthodox " Pull ! " Over came Number 3 trap and down came the bird, to the young baronet's first, as dead as a stone. He turned quietly on his heel, produced a match and applied it to his cigar, remarking to the now thoroughly disgruntled taker of odds : " You didn't make any stipulation as to my *keeping my weed alight*, did you, Besnard ? "

If Johnny Willoughby had kept such a cool head when, with " Dr. Jim " and others, he was planning a *coup d'état* at the expense of " Oom Paul," the course of history might have been considerably deflected.

Incidentally, I might mention that on one of my salmon-fishing excursions to Norway, on the good old Wilson liner *Salmo*, this same " Dr. Jim " and his " chief of staff," Major

White, were fellow passengers. This was just after they had been released from durance vile, which they had incurred owing to their part in that abortive raid. I think that the figuring out of such enterprises was a fad of Willoughby's, for I remember sitting out on the terrace with him and Lord de Clifford (affectionately known as "Ned," who ended his days at Monte, struck down by pneumonia), when, "*pour passer le temps*," we discussed the possibility of a cutting-out expedition, directed against the Casino and the vast riches which it contained. We drew up quite a reasonable plan of campaign, but I am inclined to think that any bandits who might decide to adopt our scheme would find that the Administration had some card up its sleeve which we had not foreseen and so had not provided against.

Stands Monte where it did? Aye, verily!

During my protracted patronage of the pigeon grounds, I came across all sorts and conditions of men, some distinguished, some notorious; among the latter Arthur Orton, the Tichborne claimant (quite a good shot), the hard-swearing but kind-hearted Marquess of Ailesbury, and others, whilst among the aristocracy, besides their Majesties of Serbia and Montenegro, were:

A brother of the ineffable King Bomba of Naples (the prototype of Bombastes Furioso), who had adopted the *nom de tir*, "Conte de Montecupo," a quiet and courtly gentleman, the antithesis of his notorious relative. Also the Grand Duke Peter of Russia, calling himself "Mr. Strelock," the why and wherefore of which pseudonym I was never able to discover.

Prince "Mickie" Bariatinski was quite *beau garçon*, very fair, handsome and debonair. At that time he was the *bon ami* of the adorable Lena Cavaliari, who, then at the zenith of her beauty, was quite the loveliest woman I ever remember to have seen—and that is saying something!

Another with whom I struck up a very pleasant *camaraderie* was Prince Scherinski Shihmatoff, who was at that time the director of sport in the entourage of the ill-fated Tsar.

The Prince gave me some very vivid descriptions of big game (chiefly bear) shooting, and wolf-coursing with borzois, as conducted in his native land.

He invited me to visit him at Moscow, promising me unlimited sport, to which would be added that spice of danger which is said to lend enchantment to the chase. He was intensely interested in various explosives and bullets which he had devised for the prompt and effectual subjection of Bruin.

I had thoughts of taking advantage of his generous offer of hospitality, but I have had, all my life, a hatred of snow, under any and every circumstance; so I never found my way to the vast domains of " The Little Father."

But some time later Prince Scherinski sent me a book he had written on the *laika* (barking) dogs of Russia; for, like myself, he was an enthusiastic cynophilist. This monograph was exhaustively dealt with and profusely illustrated. A few years after the Great War, I met the Princess Bariatinski (aunt of my friend " Mickie," who, I was grieved to hear, had passed away some time since).

On inquiring about Prince Scherinski, the Princess informed me that since the revolution she had lost sight of him, and feared that he had fallen a victim to the Red Terror, she herself having escaped the same fate by miraculous good fortune only.

Here I may as well set forth the sport of wolf-coursing as described to me by my lost friend.

The wolves are kept in a huge enclosure, some miles in circumference, and are driven out, one by one, on to a vast and bare plain.

It seems that *three* borzois are slipped at the fugitive.

The wolf is possessed of extraordinary speed, but the borzoi is even faster. (A good borzoi can lead a first-class greyhound to a hare many lengths, but almost invariably swings out yards at the turn, and is quite unable to run the quarry closely, or to score any telling points in the eyes of an efficient judge of coursing.) Now when the borzois reach the wolf, instead of going straight for him, they act in concert.

Two of them range up, one on each side of the unfortunate *lupus*, and keep barging into him alternately, until they have him sprawling and quite unbalanced. Presently he loses his foothold, and then borzoi number three, who has been following close to the victim's tail (I don't think the wolf's caudal appendage can be dignified with the term "brush"), pins him, and then the other two dogs join in and help to hold him down.

The mounted *chasseur*, who has been following as closely as may be, now rides up, dismounts, and produces a round wooden staff about a foot in length, to each end of which is attached a leather thong. This instrument is thrust between Mr. Wolf's jaws, and the thongs tightly fastened around his head and neck. His feet are shackled, and then he is tossed into a cart, taken back to the enclosure from whence he came, and released, to fight it out another day. Of course, both borzois and chasseur are occasionally awarded very nasty slashes from the sabre-like teeth of the wolf; but, so the Prince told me, the dogs and man are so clever and adroit that they generally come through unscathed.

A very remarkable "personality" whom I came across at the Monte Carlo *Tir*, and subsequently at other shooting enclosures, was Baron Henri de Rothschild, of colossal build, hirsute and dark.

Not only was he a great sportsman and at times an extraordinarily fine shot, but he was also a man of marked versatility, a scientist, a *littérateur* and a playwright.

At the time of writing, my friend Arthur Bourchier has just produced a drama of the Baron's at the Strand Theatre, London, which has caused a considerable sensation, especially among the Harley Street "faculty," for the said play is frankly aimed at the misdeeds of those black sheep which are said to dwell in every fold—yea, even in that which encloses so many devoted philanthropists of the medical profession.

When I first met the Baron at "Monte," we indulged in a friendly little shooting match, in which I was allowed several metres handicap, which, well as my opponent performed, just enabled me to hold a winning hand.

It was at the same entrancing spot that I met with "The Hon. Lionel," of the same ilk, who, like myself, is a devout lover of the children of the wild. As I knew "Mr. Leo" on the Turf; "Mr. Jimmy" was a fellow clubman; as I bumped up against "Baron Edouard" at "The Tables," and as Lord Rothschild was on my committee when I was master of the O.B.H., I may be said to have been constantly in touch at one time or another with many members of a family group renowned as the world's most honoured and distinguished financiers.

CHAPTER XVI

THOUGH the oldest of our field sports, coursing is a rather difficult one to understand; but it is said that if one of its votaries—through misfortune or circumstance—has had to abandon it *pro tem.*, he or she, as the case may be, is sure to return at the very first opportunity that presents itself.

Some 120 years B.C. Arrian wrote of coursing, and it is evident that he pursued his recreation in the spirit of true sportsmanship as understood to-day. He slipped only a brace of greyhounds to the hare, gave her plenty of "law," and very often called his dogs off when a gallant quarry had given them a hard and exciting course!

It is not my intention to enter upon a treatise on coursing and greyhounds. Those who seek information on the subject will find it meticulously dealt with in my "Coursing" volume of "The Badminton Library,"* and also in that part of "Dogs"† which relates to greyhounds. I simply wish to chronicle my own reminiscences of the sport as they affected me personally.

My aim in writing this book and its predecessor‡ is to deal with my experiences in various field sports, not chronologically, but, as it were, in sections; since my enjoyment of them constantly overlapped. For instance, my early endeavours as a follower of The Leash synchronized with my mastership of the O.B.H. and part of my race-riding days, to say nothing of intervening shooting and angling exploits.

At my first venture I had the luck to purchase at auction a very useful sapling out of a litter bred by that well-known courser, Mr. Miller; I named this one, who was a black, Habeas Corpus. (It is the custom of coursing men to perpetuate their own initials in the names of their greyhounds.) Each one of the litter (which was by Misteston, winner of The Waterloo Cup, out of Glenmahra, a noted matron) distinguished itself eventually; but the pick of the basket as far as "big wins" was concerned, was another black, retained by Mr. Miller and named Mullingar. He won the Champion Stakes at Kempton, among other trophies, and was possessed of extraordinary speed, though he was deficient in stamina. In this respect he was the antithesis of his brother, my Habeas Corpus, who had not first-class speed, but was a rare sticker, and could stay for a month of Sundays.

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* The Badminton Library: "Coursing," by Harding Cox, and "Falconry," by the Hon. Gerald Lascelles.

† "Dogs," Edited by Harding Cox (Fawcett, McQuire & Co.).

‡ "Chasing and Racing" (John Lane).

A propos the Kempton Champion Stakes, a good story is told of the late Dick Dunn, the vociferous and forceful, but kind-hearted and reliable bookie. He attended the meeting with an eye to business and opened his book quite correctly as regards the "long odds"; but when it came to the individual courses he got into a hopeless tangle. When Huic Holloa and Royal Stag (I think these were the two) went to the slips, Dick opened out with:

"'Ere! seven to four, 'Uic 'Oller, 'oo'll 'ave it?"

He was immediately snapped for £70 to £40 and various smaller bets. This put the wind up him, and he started to "come round on the book."

"Seven to four Royal Stag! Seven to four Royal Stag!" he shouted. A brother of the pencil, who was no neophyte, yelled out:

"What the 'ell are you up to, Dick? Blyme! *you're layin' odds agin both the blinkin' dogs!*"

"Well, wot of it?" roared Dunn. "*Ain't the pore blinkin' 'are got a chance then?*"

To return to Habeas Corpus; he won me some nice little stakes in the open country (true sport), but was not fast enough for what were known in those days as "The Enclosures." His best performance was winning the South of England Challenge Cup. As a new dog of mine, called Handley Cross, did the trick the following year, and as the South of England

Club broke up at the end of the season,* I became the proud possessor of the handsome trophy.

At the time of my entry to this engrossing sport, my guide, philosopher and friend in the venture was "Willie," of the ancient and sporting family of Hope Johnstone. It was by acting on his advice that I picked up some very useful greyhounds, most of which won in their turn. One of the best was Have a Care, a bk. and w. b. by Macpherson—Rota, and hence own sister (same litter) to a little wonder called Happy Rondelle, who made a great name for herself.

Have a Care represented me in The Waterloo Cup. She was just outpointed in her first course, but made a brave show in "The Purse." She went on to Southport, where she ran through The Bainesse Stakes in gallant style.

When her running days were over, I mated her with Greentick, one of the greatest of the Greyhound Stud-book pillars. She had a beautiful litter, but, strange to say, only one showed anything approaching winning form. But this one exception, a big black puppy, weighing all seventy pounds, was a veritable smasher! His first trial with Handley Cross—a very fast dog indeed—was, I thought, too good to be true. The youngster led him two-and-a-half lengths and made rings round him, running his hare truly and punishingly in a long course.

I sent Handley Cross on "a voyage of discovery" in an eight-dog stake, just to see if he was in form. In the first round he slammed a fast old dog, who was a great winner, and then I drew him.

Now comes the tragedy! I was determined to see what sort of a greyhound I had in Heavy Cavalry, for that was the name of my big and beautiful puppy. Alas! I made the fatal mistake of slipping him with Handley Cross *in an open country*. This time the young 'un led a good three lengths, and again refused to give his opponent a look in, finishing with a brilliant kill. Before we could pick him up, he sighted a fresh hare, and was soon tacked on to her; she made for a stiff "stake and bound" fence and slipped through a run therein. Heavy Cavalry, instead of flying the obstruction, rushed the opening, struck a stake and rolled over with a sharp cry. *His shoulder was broken!* Was there ever such cruel luck? As a rule it is only once in a lifetime that a coursing man owns a puppy of this class, and I had bred such an one myself at the first time of asking! Of course he was patched up, but was more or less of a cripple, unfit for coursing competitions. I had visions of breeding a Waterloo Cup winner by him, but he succumbed to distemper six months after his accident.

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* It was afterwards resuscitated and held annual meetings at Southminster.

The mention of trials between an old dog and a puppy brings me to a story which is not over delicate in flavour, but it has the saving grace of humour, I think.

As in horse-racing, there are "sharps" and "flats" in the coursing field, though, happily, the former, who batten on the latter, are not overpoweringly in evidence. But there was a so-called sporting farmer who was fond of the sport and not above engineering a crooked job when opportunity might afford. He was seized or possessed of a third season greyhound called Old Tuppenny, which had been a small gold-mine to him; for this veteran could give any local dog the go-by and make rings round it. He became a sort of public idol, and his victory, bar accidents, was taken as a matter of course (excuse the play on the word) whenever he was sent to the slips, so that very soon his owner, farmer Owen Thomas, found it impossible to back him. This did not suit His Nibs at all, and he was in despair, until one fine day a neighbouring butcher, David Morgan by name, having attended a sale at The Barbican, brought home a puppy which he registered as Dazzling Magic. In order to test the quality of his purchase, he fixed up with Thomas for a secret trial with Old Tuppenny. This came off all right, and "Jack was (found to be) as good as his master"—if not a bit better. Whereupon the two worthy owners put their heads together and mapped out a very pretty ramp to spring upon the innocent pencillers and guileless public at a handy meeting that was on the *tapis.* To reach this there was a short railway journey, and when "The Day" arrived the two dogs were placed in the van, in charge of the guard, one Sid Richards, who, unbeknown to the confederates, had more than a little knowledge of the ancient sport of coursing. Just before the train started Messrs. Thomas and Morgan entered the van and produced a sumptuous repast of liver and suet pudding for the "benefit" of *the old dog*, who, having been kept on short commons for twenty-four hours, "wolfed" the lot voraciously, whilst young Dazzling Magic looked on, slavering at the lips and licking his chops enviously! Then the two cronies left their precious ones with the guard and retreated to their "third smoker."

All went well until the card was called over for "long odds" on the Cup. As usual the public froze on to their undefeated favourite, Old Tuppenny, but only in silver and an occasional sovereign. Messrs. Thomas and Morgan sat tight, and when the name of Dazzling Magic was called they made no sign. He was on offer at 30 to 1. There were no takers! Suddenly the guard of the train (who had an afternoon off) butted in and offered fifty sovereigns to one *against* the puppy. The confederates stared at him in undisguised surprise, but snapped up the bet. Immediately the price shortened again to 30 to 1. A certain commissioner then got busy and took £300 to £10, followed by £250 to £10; whereupon "the book" dried up, and 5 to 1 was the best offer. Morgan, just for appearances' sake, took five fivers Dazzling Magic. If subsequently Messrs. Thomas and Morgan could have been seen totting up with their agent, the public might have been enlightened, but the checking of bets was carried out in strict seclusion, and there was still plenty of the public's money for its old favourite.

Now as luck would have it, Old Tuppenny and Dazzling Magic were drawn together. They were slipped to a stout hare; but to the dismay of their owners—jointly and severally—the first-named stretched out with a good lead and reached his hare quite three lengths in front. Coming well round with "puss," he ran his course in his very best form, and ended it with a smart kill. The puppy never had a look in, and pulled up in a state of dire distress.

Messrs. Thomas and Morgan were thunderstruck and hopelessly disgruntled. What on earth had happened to upset their nefarious plans? They chanced across Sid Richards.

"Look you, Richards," said Thomas. "Whatfor inteed tid you lay against Morgan's puppy whateffer?"

"Well, you see, it was this way, Mr. Thomas. After you had fed the old 'un and left the van, seemin'ly the motion of the train made him kind o' sea-sick, in a way o' speakin'. Anyway, he vomited somethin' crool, and the young 'un, after the manner o' dawgs, *ate it up!*"

"Inteed and to Hell with you!" shouted the enraged Thomas. "Surely to gootness you should have told us, and why for not, look you?"

"Well, I thought as how you'd get the wind up and likely give me a thick ear! Besides, I'd made up my mind to back Old Tuppenny, and thought you might be moved to give him *his tea!* seein' as how his *dinner* had disagreed with him!"

Thus were the rampers ramped! The names I have used, including those of the greyhounds are, of course, fictitious, but the facts are on record.

I think that the fastest greyhound (with the exception of the ill-fated puppy Heavy Cavalry) I ever owned, but not the best, was the bk. and w. d. Handley Cross, whom I mentioned as having won me my second South of England Challenge Cup. He filled my nomination in the Gosforth Gold Cup, and was very unlucky not to have lifted it. He survived until the semi-finals, when he fell foul of Young Fullerton, an own brother (but of a later litter) to the wonderful quadruple Waterloo hero.* This Young Fullerton, like his celebrated brother, was a big brindle, and had great speed.

It was a stirring race to the hare between him and my representative; the latter seemed to get the all-important turn on a strong outside. He was on the white collar, and after a closely-contested course, everyone expected the colourless signal to go up, but, much to general surprise, the red flag was hoisted.

It is quite true to say that the judge is the only one so placed as to be able to give a correct verdict in a give-and-take spin between greyhounds. At any rate, his opinion is the only one worth a tinker's curse *when it comes to settling!*

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* Col. North's bd. d. Fullerton.

On this occasion the man in scarlet, no doubt, saw things which were not obvious to *hoi polloi*.

But the most brilliant greyhound that I was responsible for was Dark Crystal, a bd. b. p. by Father Flint (winner of the Waterloo Cup), out of my own distinguished bitch True Token. She was a big and very handsome specimen of a "longtail," favouring her dam very markedly in looks. True Token herself had twice won for me the All-aged Stakes at the Newmarket Champion Meeting, and had also carried off the Peterborough Cup. She had an enormous stride, and in deep going she would lead anything; moreover, she could stay for ever; but she had one fatal fault which prevented her attaining the highest honours of the Leash—she was the worst killer I ever remember to have seen. In fact, as far as my own knowledge goes, she never effected a kill. The consequence was that, when pitted against a greyhound of speed, she was subjected to very punishing courses, and if the hare stood up long enough before making her escape, True Token would be run to a standstill and would thus be rendered incapable of raising a gallop next round.

Not only was she a power to be reckoned with in the field, but she was nigh perfection as regards show points. Practically she was never beaten on the bench, and soon became entitled to a Kennel Club Championship; though on one occasion (at Cruft's) she was placed second to a bitch which just previously had been sold to the exhibitor by the judge! *De mortuis nil nisi bonum;* but the deduction or the faultiness of the judgment was obvious to the *cognoscenti* (blessed word!).

Jenny, for that was True Token's kennel name, was an amiable creature enough, except as regards the feline persuasion. She was death on cats, and if she was a failure at picking up a hare, the same complaint could not be levelled against her where grimalkin was concerned. When she got out of hand and gave chase, she would sweep poor pussy up and perform a sort of pyrotechnic catherine-wheel with her, so that by the time you reached the scene of tragedy there would be nothing but fur, blood and bones to be collected. I am fond of cats, as of nearly all animals; consequently I did all I could to cure Jenny of this murderous habit, but whenever opportunity arose she would defy and outwit me.

To return to her daughter Dark Crystal. Her brief but brilliant career commenced during what I may call the third era of my coursing enterprises. This was some time after my days as M.F.H. I was then a dweller in London, and had to be content to make sundry sporting excursions, taking, on short leases, furnished houses with shootings and fishings attached, as the seasons came round. My greyhounds were trained at that period by Harry Hoad, at Southminster. There I secured a pretty little cottage, where I and my family could spend a pleasant week-end and enjoy training operations. Harry Hoad, a master of his craft, had been private trainer to my friend the late Mr. H. T. Michels, by whose courtesy my string was added to the establishment.

My eldest son, Raymond (who came to a tragic end), and my youngest, Lionel (who was at Salonika, in the M.G.C., during the war), were not greatly interested in coursing; but the middle one, Denis (late R.A.F.), whom novel readers may know under pseudonym D. H. Denis, was as keen as mustard at the fascinating sport. He was, at the time, a mere lad at an engineering college. Dark Crystal was registered in his name and ran as his property.

Her first appearance as a puppy was at Peterborough, where she won two courses in such brilliant fashion that I withdrew her with a view to the forthcoming Newmarket Champion Puppy Stakes, wherein—after slamming her first two opponents—she came across a greatly fancied candidate belonging to the Earl of Sefton. I was given to understand that his lordship had backed this one very heavily. Dark Crystal certainly led to the hare, and then, after an exchange or two, in which her opponent had rather the best of it, the hare took them out of sight of the crowd; but to my delight the flag steward came back with the red signal fluttering. Dark Crystal was on the red! Lord Sefton seemed much upset, but Mr. Brice, the judge, explained that, in the latter phases of the course, our bitch had outstayed and out-pointed her rival.

If I was a bugbear to my afterwards friend, Sir James ("Jimmy") Duke on the racecourse, I certainly occupied that unenviable position in the eyes of the overlord of the Altcar Flats;* for this was not the first time his lordship's cherished apple-cart had been upset by one of my "unconsidered trifles" in the way of greyhounds.

Thereby hangs a tale which I have anticipated, but to which I will refer in detail later on.

Dark Crystal won her next course very easily (and thus was left in the last four); but to my horror, before she could be picked up, she got on to a fresh hare and went out of sight! Harry was hot on her trail, but when at last he returned with the bitch, he had a very long face, which was only too readily accounted for when he told me the tragic fact that, though Dark Crystal had killed the fresh hare, she was on to *a third* before he could lay hands on her, and that this one had run her to a complete standstill. I had hopes that a night's rest and Harry's unremitting ministrations would enable our puppy to go to the slips next morning in tolerable shape; but when I met the trainer on the ground he shook his head sadly.

"I am afraid the bitch cannot run, sir; she could not get off her bench this morning. Shocking bad luck!"

"What is to be done?" I asked miserably.

"Well, sir, if I were you I'd see the others and try to arrange a division among four. They know what happened last night and will require 'sweetening.'"

Now the rules of coursing permit of an owner, whose nomination has been placed *hors de combat*, giving a monetary advantage to the more fortunate owners of the other survivors, in order to bring about a division of stakes and bets. So I did not hesitate to set about the task. Mr. (afterwards Sir) John Humphrey readily agreed to a division should he win (as he was practically certain to do) his semi-final. Dark Crystal was due to meet a puppy of Sir R. W. B. Jardine's. I discovered that the baronet had gone home, leaving his trainer, Beattie, with *carte blanche* and *full authority to settle*. I asked the latter if he would divide, frankly telling him that Dark Crystal was not fit to run; but that, being anxious that my son should have the honour and glory of owning a divider of such an important event as the Champion Puppy Stakes, I should welcome an "arrangement." But the cannie Scot was dead against sacrificing such an obvious advantage as he held. I then offered him, as *accredited agent of his master* (and not as a personal bribe, as he subsequently declared), twenty-five pounds to agree to a division among three, if Humphrey's dog won his course. He said he could not agree without communicating with Sir Robert, which of course was an impossibility. Well, there was nothing to be done but to withdraw our bitch from the Stake, and this was reluctantly effected.

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* The Earl of Sefton.

Shortly afterwards I received a notice from the National Coursing Committee to attend a meeting at Liverpool, on the day of the draw for the Waterloo Cup, to explain my manœuvres. At first this did not disturb my equanimity in the least. I was perfectly clear in my own conscience, and felt adequately protected by the N.C.C. rules; but I was warned that certain members of the committee were dead keen on "putting it across," and "outing" me; that the complainant was none other than the Earl of Sefton, and that there were others (on whose questionable operations I had commented—on a certain occasion during a competition for the Blue Ribbon) who were on the war path. My friends—and I am glad to say I had many among the noble army of coursers—set about a counter-attack (of which I knew nothing) with such good results that in addition to its British contingent, a powerful bunch of sportsmen representing Irish Clubs crossed the Channel for the purpose of seeing justice and right triumph.

Now, as the issue was one of vital importance to me, and as I had been warned, as stated, of the cabal that was being engineered for my undoing, I determined to take no risks; so I induced my good friend "Willie" (afterwards Sir Charles) Mathews—who later became Director of Public Prosecutions—to accompany me to Liverpool, with a view to the protection of my name and interests as a sportsman and a gentleman. The meeting of the N.C.C. Committee was held at the Exchange Hotel, the Duke of Leeds being in the Chair. There were present all the leading lights of the coursing world, with the exception, strange to say, of Lord Sefton, who, so I was given to understand, was the attacker of my honour.

It was decided that Mathews could not be admitted, either in a legal or a lay capacity; so I had to conduct my own defence. The noble chairman was courtesy itself, and motioned me to a chair on his left hand. I was prepared for Beattie giving a garbled account of the transaction, and I was not disappointed. Lord Sefton's trainer, too, made himself objectionable, though he owed me a small debt of gratitude.* Sir Robert Jardine himself was non-committal, but Humphrey, Hoad and others cleared the atmosphere, whilst the Hibernian contingent was alert for "wigs on the green." I was asked to withdraw, but was not kept long in suspense.

On my return His Grace of Leeds announced that the finding of the Committee was, that I had had no intention of contravening the rules of coursing, or of acting in any way dishonourably; but that I had been *very indiscreet.*

Now this decision has caused me ceaseless annoyance; because I fail to see where the "indiscretion" comes in; for I was only pursuing a very ordinary practice, and one entirely in conformity with the rules of the N.C.C. Had the Committee decided that I had, in fact, offered Beattie a *personal* bribe, behind his employer's back, it would have been a different pair of shoes altogether, and I should have richly deserved "warning off;" but evidently they jettisoned any such idea, which left me with a perfectly clean sheet. Then why "*very indiscreet?*"

"Willie" Mathew's journey to Liverpool was abortive, but methinks his presence outside the door was of decided *moral* value to my cause.

So the storm in a teacup subsided, and I went to the draw in fairly good heart. By the time the calling of the card was commenced, the hearty congratulations of my numerous friends and an excellent banquet quite restored me to my normal humour.

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* See p. 184.

During the time Harry Hoad was training my greyhounds at Southminster, Michels had a very useful string; among them the little bk. b. p. Minchmuir, whose kennel name was Juliet. We two owners had no kennel secrets between us, and acted as if all the inmates of the establishment were common to us both. Another very fast puppy was Dark Cloth (Weasel), registered (like the ill-fated Dark Crystal) in the name of my son Denis; but this one, a w. and bd. d. p., was not possessed of great stamina, and was more adapted to "The Enclosures" than to legitimate coursing. Minchmuir won a splendid Waterloo trial, and we all had great faith in her ability to make a show in the great event, in which she filled her owner's nomination. When the card was called over, she was on offer at 40 to 1, at which price we backed her to win some six thousand pounds, and split the bets *pro rata*. And a right royal run we had for our money too! She worked her way into the semi-finals in faultless fashion, then to our great delight she led and well beat her next opponent; but alas, that bugbear of coursing owners and trainers, *a fresh hare*, intervened, and away went Juliet, right up The Withens and over the bank on to a stiff plough. By the time she was picked up, she was baked to a frazzle, and *only twenty minutes to go before she was due in the slips to contest the final!* What cruel, what exasperating luck again!

Everything that expert knowledge, skill and experience were able to do was put into practice, and all we could hope for was a *deus ex machina*—a miracle of luck to discount the crushing handicap! The other finalist was Mr. Herbert's* f. d. p. Homfray, no doubt a useful, but by no means a brilliant customer, and an uncommonly lucky one to get where he was.

As might be expected, Minchmuir came stiffly from the slips; but the fawn only led a length at the turn, and not coming round particularly smoothly, led up our little bitch, who nicked in and drove her hare for a meritorious turn, wrenched twice, and then made a desperate effort to kill. Had she done so, her name would have been added to the list of Waterloo Cup Champions. As it was, she "flecked" her hare, but could not pick it up! This caused a serious stumble, which gave Homfray (who had got off very lightly in all his courses) a chance of which he promptly took advantage. Poor Juliet's bolt was shot! Exhausted nature gave out; she did not score another point!

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* *Nom de chasse.*

When the fiasco in the semi-final occurred, we were wise enough to hedge, and were able to do so by *laying off* at 2 to 1, since Homfray was not considered of much account. Indeed, it is probable that he was the worst dog that ever won the Blue Ribbon of the Leash. It was most distressing to all of us to be so near to, and yet so far from, gaining the coveted prize.

But if Homfray was the worst dog that ever annexed the Cup, he was not *the worst that ever ran in it*, believe me! No! That distinction rests with a creature of my own.

This was at a much earlier date, viz., in my salad days as a courser. I was at that time busy hunting my fox-hounds, but I did not like the idea of returning my nomination. There was a sale of greyhounds at The Barbican a few weeks before the Cup; so seeing in the catalogue a bk. d. (*own brother, same litter, to Fullerton*) I sent a commission to buy him, thinking that any greyhound by Greentick—Bit of Fashion, if fit and sound, must be capable of giving a good account of itself. As it happened, I had nothing capable of trying my new purchase, so he ran "dark." I forget what his original name was, but I re-registered him Hi Cockalorum. I am glad to say I was not at the meeting, for the brute was led a dozen lengths in the first round of the Cup and never scored a point or indeed got anywhere near the hare. The same fate awaited him in "The Purse." I had to submit to any amount of chaff; whilst the Sporting Press "told me off" for insulting the sport of coursing by entering such a beast in the Dog Derby!

Well, I think it served me right. I ought to have made myself acquainted with Hi Cockalorum's real quality (or rather, want of it) before sending him to Altcar.

As long as Hoad was at Southminster, he and friend Michels were the victims of tantalizing luck. The year following the Minchmuir tragedy, the latter's brother in blood, the bk. d. p. Mandini, ran into the last four, and on the next occasion the bk. b. p. Mirko, another of the family, occupied a like position. But after the untimely death of poor Harry Michels, Hoad became private trainer to Mr. (afterwards Sir) Edward Hulton, and signalized his appointment by winning the Blue Ribbon with Hallow Eve.

When Dark Cloth first ran in the Waterloo Cup, he was just beaten in the first round (on The Withens), but put up a good show in " The Purse " on The Lydiate, only to succumb in the semi-finals on the first-named flat. This performance he exactly repeated the following year.

Thus his Waterloo score stood :

Withens : 2 defeats—no wins.

Lydiate : 4 wins—no defeats.

Talk about " Horses for courses," I think " *Greyhounds* for *Grounds* " is an equally apposite saying ! I have noted many such coincidences.

Again I have defied chronology and have anticipated. I must now go back to my " second era " as a courser.

I had been out of the hunt for several years, but had a yearning to come back. I was at that time established at Cassio Bridge, near Watford, where I had a large assortment of dogs, but nothing in the hound line except an aged bloodhound called Prim, whose office it was to mount sentry over the *lares et penates* at night ; for which duty she exacted pay in the shape of raw hens' and ducks' eggs which she abstracted from the nests and devoured wholesale.

I had there a dozen of my noted flat-coated retrievers, a grand team of cocker spaniels (mostly black) and an equally beautiful bunch of clumbers, plus various terriers, a bulldog (alleged), a pug or two and other odds and ends.

CHAPTER XVII

I HAPPENED to run across a great coursing character, one Sam Deacon, whose personal appearance was ponderous and impressive; for he presented a fine understudy of the Tichborne Claimant, Arthur Orton. Now Sam was an excellent judge of a greyhound, and when he told me that Mr. Dunmore was selling his string, and that a litter of first season runners was to be had, such as would surely produce several high-class winners, I began to sit up, and finally commissioned him to buy for me. He secured two bitches, Dear Ada and Dear Lucy. The latter was useful; but it was the former who turned out one of the very best of her age and size. I re-registered her Handy Cat—a very appropriate name. She was only a little bit of a thing, about forty-two pounds weight, but she had fair speed, and once on the scut her nose remained there (let puss twist and turn and jerk as she would) until she could use her teeth, in which important particular she was most proficient.

Sometimes she would be led in the early stages of a stake; but let her opponent make the slightest mistake, and she had him beat in a twinkling. As a contest progressed, and when the surviving dogs began to lose some of their speed, Handy Cat retained hers; so would, in the final stages, both lead and outwork the other greyhounds.

This happened in The Barbican Cup. I had backed her at £200 to £6, but gave nearly all my bets away to relations and friends. The dog left in for the final with my representative was the speedy Mister O'Shea, belonging to Lord Sefton, who, however, was not present. Unfortunately, in the semi-finals, this dog was so hard run that he collapsed. The Earl's trainer (known as "Weasel") could not get him round to go to slips; so he came to me asking for a division—I to take the Cup. Now, although I was keen on winning this handsome trophy *outright*, I would have agreed to this, in a spirit of sportsmanship and sympathy; but a friend, who had half my bet, and had taken another £200 to £6 "on his own," intervened and implored me to claim stakes, as he had, he said, hedged, and if a division were agreed on, he not only would have lost a certain three hundred pounds, but his hedging money would have equalled the sum due to him on the "dead heat." What could I do but refuse the division *officially*; so that Handy Cat might be declared *the absolute winner*, and thus land the money of her backers; for there were many others besides the friend mentioned who had supported her on my recommendation? There was no other course open to me; but I wrote to Lord Sefton explaining the circumstances and asking him if he would allow me to present his trainer with a solatium?

The answer was in the affirmative, and "Weasel" called on me at my London flat to receive the *douceur*; but it would appear that the outcome of the affair rankled in the minds of both master and man.*

I forgot to mention that during this era of my coursing career my string was trained by Alf Reynolds, of Pewsey, on the Wiltshire downs. Reynolds was a right down good fellow and a clever and painstaking trainer. My "kennel companion" was in this instance Squire Alexander, a great sportsman, and, like myself, keen on anything to do with horses, hounds and dogs. He it was who so unexpectedly won the Ascot Cup in 1904 with Throwaway. He was also the hero of an amusing match at the Bibury Cup Meeting between one of his own gees and one of "The Mate's" (Sir John Astley)†—Owners Up! As the weight of the two sportsmen, in the aggregate, was about equal to two sacks of flour and a cartload of bricks, sympathy for their unfortunate mounts was acute; but there was much hilarity over the set-to. I forget which of the two was—second!

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* See account of N.C.C. inquiry, pp. 178 and 179.

† By an unfortunate slip, alluded to in "Chasing and Racing" as Sir *George* Astley.

When another hiatus in the continuity of my coursing occurred I sold Handy Cat to Squire Alexander, and it was whilst representing him in the Eversleigh Cup that she met with a tragic but painless end. I was not present, but Alf Reynolds gave me the details. It seems that the little red bitch had won her first two courses in her own inimitable style, and in the semi-finals had monopolized the hare until puss got on to, and ran up, a rough cart track intersected by deep ruts. Handy Cat made a determined stroke to kill, and in so doing her jaws caught in one of these ruts. The impetus and impact being so dynamic that she turned head over heels and lay dead with a broken neck! A strange and most unfortunate accident.* She was to have filled her owner's nomination in The Waterloo Cup, where, had she had the luck to escape the "swallow catchers" in the early rounds, she might well have triumphed, as have Coomassie and other little ones of her calibre; but it was not to be. Blue Ribbon apart, her value as a brood bitch would assuredly have been inestimable.

It was some time later, when after an interval I had returned to the sport, that Sam Deacon told me of some very useful greyhounds in Lincolnshire, bred by one Tom Creasey. It was near the time for the Newmarket Champion Puppy Stakes, and I had a mind to cut in and chance my luck; so trusting to big Sam's acumen, I told him to come to Creasey's terms and to leave the puppies in that worthy's hands to be prepared, as I was assured that his training methods had always met with extraordinary success.

For some reason or other, I was unable to be present on the first day; but on arriving at the "Rutland Arms" in the evening I was met by Sam with the encouraging news that each of my puppies had won their respective spins and that True Token had been equally successful in the All Aged Stakes. I was curious to see my new purchases, both w. and bd. b's., who were by Corby Castle (a local celebrity) *ex* Climbing Nell, who came of a hardy Lincolnshire strain.

My eyes rested on two very fine specimens, possessed of size, bone and substance, and showing really remarkable muscular development. I suppose I acted as a Hoo-doo to my own luck, for both were beaten next time they went to slips, though they were by no means disgraced; in fact, the bigger one, whom I had registered as High Crawler (as indicating her dam), was very unluckily knocked out. The other High Creeper, unfortunately lamed herself badly. As a measure of compensation, True Token performed brilliantly and divided the All Aged Stakes.

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* Recently Sir George Noble, in writing to me, mentioned a similar fatal accident to a valuable greyhound of his.

High Crawler did not run again until The Waterloo Cup, wherein she represented me. In the first ties on the Hill House flat she easily beat a dog which I knew to be a very smart one and which was considered by its connections to be trained to the minute and absolutely fit.

My bitch had been quoted at the long odds of 1,000 to 3, which I took twice, but her first course had not been carefully studied; consequently when she went to the slips on The Withens for her second trial 7 to 2 was betted against her. A sudden inspiration to plunge seized me, and I snapped up £70 to £20 several times and then £300 to £100; operations altogether on a far bigger scale than it was my custom to exploit. Consequently I suffered the pangs of "the needle" whilst the slipper awaited a favourable opportunity to run out.

But I was soon on good terms with myself, for High Crawler led well, and spun round her opponent, who had no chance with a short running hare. My puppy ended an exceedingly smart course with a clever kill.

This left her in the last sixteen. The next day she went to slips with China Craze, a very remarkable second season bitch, who, if not actually unbeaten when she came to Altcar, at any rate had run up an extraordinary sequence of courses won. At that time there was a nasty "grip," or filled-in ditch, in the middle of The Lydiate, just where the greyhounds were likely to reach the hare. Loud and deep had been the complaints of owners and trainers, but it was not until some years later that the trouble was effectually dealt with. On the present occasion it proved the undoing of High Crawler. It was a grand race to the hare. The bitches were almost neck and neck, but, nearing the fatal grip, mine was showing her head in front; she literally "put her foot in it," and pitched slightly. This enabled China Craze to score the turn (by the narrowest of margins), and the next. Then High Crawler dashed in and killed to lose!

This law is one which sorely puzzles the neophyte or "the layman." "How," say they, "can a greyhound kill to lose? Is it not his (or her) business *to kill at the first opportunity?*"

Undoubtedly it is, and this is the one foul blot on the fair sport of coursing. Unfortunately there is no remedy! All sorts of suggestions have been made, but not one that is practicable. There it is! You cannot tell your "longtail" to abstain from bowling over his hare until he holds a winning balance! On the other hand, suppose a dog leads his opponent two or three lengths, scores again, and then turns puss into the jaws of the other. It would be cruel luck on the vastly superior dog if the spin were accounted an "undecided"! No! the issue must remain an example of the fortune of war and a matter of luck! They say that all sports are rendered more piquant by the condiment of chance.

As China Craze was beaten next round by one of the cracks, I have no reason to suppose that I should have lifted The Cup, even if High Crawler had met with better luck than that which befell her in the third round.

A Waterloo Cup winner in which I was greatly interested from a personal, as well as a financial, point of view was Pistol II., who triumphed in 1905. I and my son Denis were hobnobbing with the owner ("Billy" Pawson), at The Banquet, and when the card was called over we had been so impressed with the dog's chance, as disclosed by Billy, that we backed Pistol II. heartily, both at long odds (40 to 1 if I remember rightly) and for the first ties. How he ran through the stake is a matter of history.

One of my earliest nominations in the Waterloo Cup was a bd. d. p. called Cagliostro, whom I owned in partnership with my friend, Sir William Ingram, of *Illustrated London News* fame, whose brother Walter had been my subaltern in the Duke of Cambridge's Hussars. This was the best bred greyhound "as ever was," being by Greentick—Miss Glendyne (the dual winner of "The Blue Ribbon"), who was herself own sister to Bit of Fashion,* the dam of the mighty Fullerton. But Cagliostro, though a likely-looking dog, and one that could go a bit, was not up to Waterloo form. He was beaten in the first ties and only survived one round in "The Purse."

I forget what became of him, but had he been afforded a chance at the stud his wonderful breeding, size and good looks must have told, and yet his name does not appear in any tabulated pedigree that I have scanned.

My last appearance (having a candidate in my charge) at Altcar was in 1914, when The Cup was won by Dilwyn, a little fawn bitch of the Handy Cat type, belonging to my good friends, the brothers Dennis. As my own son Denis and I were partakers of their lavish and much appreciated hospitality throughout the meeting, we could almost claim a personal interest in the triumph of the bonnie and clever little bitch.

Our own runner on that occasion was the bd. d. p. Dark Cavalier, a handsome youngster who had distinguished himself at Southminster. We had some hopes that he would make a really good show; and though he went down in the first ties of The Cup and also of "The Purse," he was by no means disgraced, for in each case he was beaten by a narrow margin only.

When discussing, and when asked what, in my opinion, was the best horse I had ever seen run, I have hesitated as between St. Simon and Ormonde.

There are still living those who, when it comes to greyhounds, are in equal doubt as between the great little Master McGrath and the mighty Fullerton. I am not one of these; for the amply sufficient reason that I never had the good fortune to set eyes on Lord Lurgan's wonder. But I was a witness of *all* Fullerton's Waterloo triumphs, and have no hesitation in placing him in the top notch. With Colonel North out of the way, I should have been his happy owner. Before he ever ran, he was submitted to auction under good Mr. Stollery's hammer at The Barbican. Something more than a rumour had reached my ears as to the puppy's superlative merit; but having bid up to "a monkey" (five hundred pounds), and seeing that the bluff but hearty Colonel was set on having Fullerton *at any price*, I cried a go!

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* Bit of Fashion divided The Waterloo Cup with Miss Glendyne in 1887. I had the honour of running her in my nomination when she made a good show in "The Plate."

Edward Dent, who knew more about greyhounds and coursing than anyone of his time, and who had the training of the big brindle, told me some tall stories of trials in which the youngster had taken part; though there was an occasion when, so he said, Fullerton had been fairly and squarely beaten by his "aunt," the incomparable Miss Glendyne. This was coincidental with the tale of John Porter regarding the defeat of Ormonde by Kendal in a trial, just before the former won the Dewhurst Plate.

The history of Fullerton has been told over and over again; but as a friend and guest of North's, I took the dog to my heart from the first, supported him religiously, and associated myself as keenly with his exploits almost as if he had been my own property. What a nerve!

So I will jot down a few facts from my own point of view.

In 1889 Fullerton, as a puppy, divided The Cup with his kennel companion Troughend. Had the final been run off, it would have been all Lombard Street to a Seville orange on the brindle.

In 1890 he won outright.

In 1891 ditto.

In 1892 ditto.

Then, in 1893, the stupid mistake was made of running him *as a fifth season dog*, with a result fully foreseen and expected by all knowledgeable coursing men! Poor Fullerton!

Strange to say, this mighty champion was incapable of propagating his race; but his brothers, Young Fullerton, and Simonian "carried on" with fairly satisfactory results.

Curiously enough, it was the latter, a black dog with a fine turn of speed and no "slouch" at the game, who was within an ace of bringing about the downfall of Fullerton, on the occasion of the latter's third essay for Cup honours. The two came against one another during the contest, and were slipped to an indifferent hare. Simonian had the inside.

I was well placed to see the run up and can vouch for it that "the black" just got the turn by favour. Then Fullerton was in for a couple, and turned the hare to his brother, who wrenched, but, by a supreme effort, Fullerton took puss away and put in one, two, three, before placing the hare for Simonian* to score a kill of no merit.

It was only the brindle's brilliant cleverness that averted defeat. A turn of luck the wrong way and it would have been "all U.P." with the favourite!

Every other course I saw Fullerton run he won with consummate ease. He had such a stride that he could lead from the slips, or give the "go-by" to any living longtail and paralyse the stoutest of hares. He seemed to tower over them, and, as it were, peg them down, so that he completely dominated their movements, and thus rendered their wiliest tactics abortive. This style of running does not make killing a matter of course, or, for the matter of that, by any means an easy job. In his earlier days, Colonel North's paragon was not over brilliant or successful in bringing his teeth into play; though latterly he showed great improvement in this respect. Anyway, it made no difference, for he never gave his opponent the opportunity to butt in and take advantage of the weakness.

After Fullerton had retired from active service, he was kept on show at Colonel North's mansion. One day he disappeared and nothing was heard of him for some weeks. Large rewards were offered, and at last the poor old fellow was recovered; but he was all to pieces and a mere shade of his once beautiful self. He never quite recovered and soon passed in his checks. His remains were sent to the taxidermist, and, when the effigy was complete, it was set up in the Natural History Museum at South Kensington, where it may be seen any day. But, oh! what a caricature it presents of one of the handsomest, and assuredly the best greyhound that ever went to slips—in my day.

The office of the coursing judge is by no means a sinecure. For the purpose, a man need be equipped, not only with an intimate and exact knowledge of the rules which govern the sport from a running point of view, but he must also possess an eye which takes in every detail of a course and instantaneously conveys its message to the brain, which, in turn, must be so alert that it can appraise the points which are being scored and tot them up with such exactitude that, at any given moment, the judge can at once determine which of the competitors is entitled to the raising of the flag in its favour.

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* Simonian had some consolation in the winning of the Waterloo Plate.

The critical faculty must be *in excelsis*, and its arithmetical calculation absolutely accurate. Our judge must have the courage of his convictions. Once his decision is given he must abide by it, though he should be ever ready to explain the why and wherefore thereof. He must be virile, alert, and a good horseman, with untiring physical and moral energy.

It is not often that a judge is called upon to deal with his own greyhounds when pitted against those of other owners. And yet such was the anomalous and rather embarrassing position which was, on one occasion, forced upon me.

Not infrequently I have acted in the judicial capacity during my coursing days; but never before or since under such curious circumstances.

It was at Wye, in the bad old days of enclosed coursing. There were several "sapling" stakes in addition to the usual "all aged" and "puppy" affairs.

Being desirous of obtaining a fair trial for my youngsters and of accustoming them to the amenities of a public meeting, I had entered a greyhound in every event. The late Mr. Brice—at that time *facile princeps* among coursing judges of his day, and a universally and deservedly popular one—was scheduled to officiate; but, as bad luck would have it, for some reason or other, he failed to put in an appearance.

What was to be done?

The committee had a brain-wave.

The writer was approached and asked to take up the onerous and responsible duty.

"But," said I, "I have a dog in every stake—I am particularly anxious to run them!"

"And why not?" asked the spokesman of the deputation innocently.

"Why not?" repeated I. "Surely to goodness you don't expect me *to run my dogs and to act as judge as well ?* Good Lord, what next ? "

A chorus broke out.

" That'll be all right, Captain—we all know you and trust you ! "

" Carry on, sir. If you can't judge your own dogs, whose can you judge ? "

And so on and so forth.

Well, I did actually judge, and not one of my decisions was called into question ; but I did not feel at all happy.

As it happened, in every case my own representatives either won easily and obviously, or were easily and obviously beaten.

Had it been otherwise, and had the issue in any particular case been a near thing, I should have been tempted to give the other fellow's dog the verdict, even if I had had it in the back of my head that my own greyhound had a point or two to the good.

A sign and token of want of moral courage no doubt, and one which might have inflicted a distinct injustice upon all and sundry (if any) who had backed my representative ; but such is my nature, which is essentially of the human quality.

Anyhow, everyone seemed quite pleased and content with the show, so why trouble about " what *might have been* " ?

At a small meeting where I donned the pink, two black dogs went to the slips for the principal event. Of course, one wore a white colour and the other a red. The latter led three lengths and gave his opponent no quarter, winning with an overwhelming balance in hand.

I pulled the red handkerchief out of my pocket and signalled to the flag steward, who immediately raised the corresponding bunting.

A hefty and explosive personality, who seemed on the verge of apoplexy, induced by boiling and uncontrollable wrath, rushed up and thus addressed me :

" Look here, you blankety-blank crook, call yourself a judge. You're either a dead wrong 'un, or a live fool ; perhaps you are both, you——! "

I was amazed !

"For the love of Mike, old sport, what have I done?" I asked meekly.

"What have you done, why you've given the course to a —— dog what never scored a —— point in the whole —— course!"

(My irate friend used an identical adjective in each case. The blanks can be filled in to taste.)

"On the contrary, the red did everything including the kill. If your dog was on the white collar, my friend, he never had a look in from first to last."

"The red," he shrieked. "The red. Why damn it all, they told me you had given it to the white!"

It seems that in his hurry and excitement, he had missed the flag steward's signal, and then some wags had pulled his leg and sent him hot foot to tell me his honest opinion of my efforts in the judicial seat.

Of course his apologies were profuse and quite heart-rending.

"*Parturiunt montes nascetur ridiculus mus!*"

Already I have alluded to the enthusiasm for their favourite sport which burns in the heart of practically every man or woman, boy or girl, when once they have become conversant with the intricacies of the great game. This is well illustrated by the story of a certain field officer of high rank whose command was on the French front during the Great War. This gallant gentleman was an out-and-out lover of the leash, and when he "became wise to" the fact that hares abounded in his sector, his thoughts spanned the Channel and rested on his kennels in Old Blighty. He began to yearn for a sight of his well-trained and belovèd "speed machines." He visualized them pressing puss, of the Gallic variety; but how was it to be contrived? The question of importing a couple of brace of his longtails offered no difficulty to a man of his resource and forceful authority; but how was he to get his favourites *back* to their native land when they had served their purpose? Quarantine! Ah, there was the rub!

Anyhow, he would chance it, even if he had to submit to their becoming permanently nationalized to Fair France, or if, unhappily, they should fall into the hands of the

Bosche, and be utilized for some synthetic production or *Ersatz* comestible.

In due course the greyhounds arrived, all safe and sound, and were soon busy delighting the hearts of a gay and enthusiastic throng of sporting warriors by their speed and cleverness, and incidentally providing a welcome addition to the *menu* of the Mess.

Came a time when the far spreading pinions of " Peace " (What a sorry " Peace " it has proved !) intervened between the devastating horrors of War and the fury of the outraged gods.

Our sporting officer was for England, home and beauty. No, he would *not* abandon his canine team. It had served its purpose well, and each unit was doubly endeared to its proud owner.

What was to be done ?

A brain-wave, worthy of the great strategist and tactician that he was, saved the situation. His batman—who was also a skilled kennelman, and who acted as slipper in connection with the coursing enterprise toward (and *some* slipper too !)—was the only living soul that was taken into the confidence of his master. His name was Tim Mahoney (let us say), from whence his nationality may be easily surmised.

The transport was at the quay side, and the happy lads were embarking in hilarious mood.

Tim could be seen traversing the gangway " humping " a plethoric kit-bag. Having deposited this in his master's state room, he returned to *terra firma*, and retrieved a similar burden, then a third, and finally a fourth.

Let us span time and drop in on our sportsman's spacious and sumptuous kennels, the locality of which it would not be discreet to indicate.

Lo and behold ! Here were the two couples of expeditionary longtails, safe back in their own cushy quarters, and apparently in the best of health and spirits. Not being Mahatmas, how on earth were their corporeal beings transported from " overseas " without the intervention of a vigilant Customs service ? It is no easy job to reduce four No. 1 full-sized and lively greyhounds to " nothingness ! "

But it *was* done! And in this wise.

The dogs had been taken to a military shed near the port of embarkation, where the conspirators proceeded *to chloroform them.* Each inanimate corpus was thrust into a specially constructed kit-bag and taken aboard by Tim. They were all revived in the officer's cabin, and when the chalk hills of Old Blighty were near at hand, the anæsthetic was again administered and the dogs were landed in the same fashion as they had been embarked; arrangements having been carefully made for their revival when they had been "cleared." This was a clever bit of work; but it was risky and hardly moral. Risky, because dogs of all breeds are peculiarly susceptible to chloroform and its kindred vapours. A large percentage succumb, even when administration is by an expert anæsthetist. Immoral, because the quarantine of imported dogs is essential to the prevention of that most terrible disease—rabies. There is little doubt but that the outbreak which occurred in 1916, and which was not entirely exorcised until 1922, was due to the wickedly selfish conduct of certain air pilots, who evaded quarantine by using their planes to bring into this country dogs collected in foreign districts where rabies was at that time rampant.

CHAPTER XVIII

AFTER effecting the capture of various inconsiderable specimens of the *Salar* ilk in the United Kingdom and Ireland, my soul was stirred by descriptions, verbal and journalistic, of what was to be done in the Land of the Midnight Sun; so I took the earliest opportunity available for a personal and intimate investigation.

I fastened on one particular bit of fishing in Messrs. Lumley's list as being quite to my taste, provided it came anywhere near the description provided. This was Colonel Whitmore's stretch of the Surendal river, yclept Harang, where the fly, and the fly only, was *de rigueur*. I was placed in communication with the gallant owner, and after a courteous and pleasant correspondence, the lease of the water for June and July was signed, sealed and delivered.

In due course I found myself with the C.O. and her brother, my valet Bedford and his wife Flora (our cook), enjoying the hospitality of the little Wilson liner *Juno, en route* for Christiansund. I shall never forget my first sight of Aalsund, and the inhalation of the indescribably delicious air of Norway. From Christiansund we proceeded to our destination in a launch, laden with stores provided at reasonable tariffs by my agents, Messrs. Dahl Brothers.

After landing, we had a seven-mile journey in carioles and stolkjerries, through a truly lovely country, until we arrived at our Harang quarters—a charming lodge, replete with all reasonable comforts. We were cordially welcomed by Peter Olam, the water bailiff, and an amiable old Laverack setter bitch called Belle. I forgot to mention that my C.O. had insisted on bringing her (alleged) fox-terrier Billy along with us. His presence she declared to be *sine qua non*. In order to comply with the order, I had to submit to a most drastic form of investigation and endless passport amenities, in which the Norwegian Minister of the Interior, various veterinary examiners, the British Consul, the officers of the Excise and many others were involved; for the Norwegian Government, very wisely, takes every possible precaution to avoid the possibility of that awful disease rabies establishing itself in the country.

This Billy was the prototype of my lamented Cockie. He had the same sultry and sulphuric temperament when crossed or thwarted by anyone but his mistress or myself. Whilst, like my never-to-be-forgotten favourite, he feared nothing that sported fur, feather or fin; for as regards the last, he was apt to violently attack a struggling salmon when it was being brought to the gaff.

This was embarrassing to all concerned, except himself; so after one such experience, Master Billy was "fired" from further participation in the sport of angling, and had to content himself with the harrying of such vermin as he could rout out, or unearth.

During our stay at Harang, I had a hunch to obtain a clutch of "hoodie" crow nestlings for petting purposes; so I offered a reward of five kroners to any of the native youth who would bring me the callow birds.

This resulted in a score of the little rascals, in various stages of development, being, figuratively speaking, laid at my feet.

Of course, it was out of the question that I should adopt the whole consignment, so I selected a likely brace, paid the venturesome lad who brought them, the agreed pieces of silver, and dismissed the rest with a kroner each, as a sort of consolation prize.

I do not know what the ultimate fate of the eighteen rejected fledglings was. It does not bear thinking about!

The chosen twain, however, waxed strong and vigorous; becoming so tame and amenable to human society that they would follow me wherever I went, and by their amusing antics and cute intelligence, soon endeared themselves to my heart.

Now it is notorious that dogs share with mankind (which, of course, includes womankind) the attacks of " the green-eyed monster " in acute form.

From the first, Billy bitterly resented my attention to, and affection for, these intrusive bantlings. On one occasion he made a violent assault on them, and I was only just in time to avert a sad tragedy. Of course, Billy was " for it," and correction was administered to him—hard and good! This hearty castigation gave him cause for serious reflection, so, for the time being, he regarded the interlopers with dignified toleration; though he refused anything like a response to the friendly overtures which Lars and Ole (as the young " hoodies " were called) persisted in making.

But all the time he was—as it turned out—harbouring black thoughts in his canine brain, and thinking out a terrible and satisfying revenge.

When I was busy with my flies on the river, my C.O. or her brother were generally on sentry go over our *lares* and *penates*; but there came a fatal day when the homestead was left temporarily untenanted; for Bedford and Flora, his wife, had sallied forth to obtain rations (other than salmon), whilst the C.O. and her brother had strolled down to the river, intent on witnessing my operations and joining me in a picnic luncheon.

As they came up, I noticed that, for once in a way, the terrier was not in attendance.

" Why, where's Billy ? " I asked.

" Oh," replied she of my heart. " I thought he would be in the way and interfere with your sport, Cockie dear."

" What did you do with him then ? "

" I just locked him up in the loft."

This from Marcus (the brother).

" Not with Lars and Ole, I hope ! " I inquired breathlessly.

" Oh, they're all right, Cockie, I fastened them up in their cage—snug and safe."

Thus assured, I let the matter drop; but I was haunted by a persistent presentiment, all the time I was fishing; so after our frugal meal, I accompanied the others to the *hüs* and immediately hurried to the loft. Alas! my fears were only too well founded.

A dreadful sight met my eyes when I opened the door. The whole place was a shambles—blood, bones, intestines and feathers covered the floor; whilst the cage that had held my pets lay on one side, all bent, misshapen and properly "busted." And there was the murderer—crouched in the corner, deep dyed with the evidence of his crime: red of eyes and slavering of lips, from which depended particles of crimson-besmirched plumage!

Marcus, who had been following close behind, now joined me.

"Look at that now!" he exclaimed. "There's a little devil for you! What are you going to do with him, Cockie?"

"I can't think of anything bad enough," I replied.

A brain-wave struck me.

"I have it: we'll put him in the cage, tie a rope to it, and roll it down the slope into the river. Then when the little brute has had a good ducking, we will pull him out. If that does not cure him of his murderous ways, I don't know what will!"

No sooner thought of than done.

Billy cringed and dragged himself along the floor of the loft on his "tummy," with deprecating squirms; but I was adamant, and Marcus soon had him incarcerated.

"Better not let *her* know," he said, inclining his head towards the *hüs!*

Marcus held his fair sister in wholesome respect.

Well, we carried out the edict thoroughly and sufficiently. By the time we had finished with him, it was a very subdued and shivering little terrier that followed us home with his stump of a tail well tucked between his thighs.

Even so, my wrath had not entirely evaporated. I reported the crime to my C.O., and told her that I was determined to put her favourite in Coventry for at least a week.

With all his faults, Billy loved me—as I think dogs only *can* love! He knew he had offended me grievously, and when he found that I made no sort of response to his affectionate overtures, and that I simply ignored him, he took it sorely to heart, refused his food, and fell into a state of obvious despondency.

At the end of the fifth day, when we were sitting down to dinner, I felt one trembling paw on my knee. There was the wretched Billy, with such a look of abject misery on his upturned face that I began to relent.

'Cockie, dear," said the C.O. pleadingly, "*do* forgive Billy, he has been punished enough. Ever since you gave him the lemon eye, he has been eating his poor little heart out. Look at him now! Can you resist him?"

I could not!

When I spoke to him and stroked his head, the unbounded joy of that terrier was a treat to behold, and an object lesson in canine psychology!

I started out on this section of my experiences with a view to describing the sport which I enjoyed with the *salmo* genus on the occasion of my first visit to Norway; but I have wandered, all too far, into a dissertation wherein dogs and crows have usurped the space which should have been devoted to fish and fishing.

So let us hark back to the evening when our cavalcade and impedimenta arrived at Harang.

Leaving the rest of my *entourage* to unpack and put things straight—a job which I simply loathe—I drew the cheery Peter into conversation on the all-absorbing topic of sport. I found that he was quite conversant with the English tongue; though he voiced it in a decidedly quaint way. He told me that the river was now in excellent ply, and that there was a good show of running fish.

It was then about 11 p.m. (*not* "summer time"), but still quite light. I asked Peter if there was a pool handy where, if I got a move on, I might have a chance to celebrate my arrival in the land of his forefathers by the capture of a salmon.

"Oo, yez," he said enthusiastically. "There'm Solem pöl. You'm catch'm—stor fisk ther, yeu tink."

Which being translated reads:

"Oh, yes. There is Solem pool. You would get a big fish there, I think!"

Now this Solem pool was doubtless the best in the whole stretch, and when conditions were right, as they were on the occasion toward, it was odds on rising a fish, even if one failed to pull him out.

Happily my rods, etc., were handy; so in less than no time I was with Peter in the boat, and all eagerness to commence action. My fly was a medium size "black dog" which my boatman had selected as a likely lure.

We had drifted some fifty yards when Peter spoke.

"Now we'm comin' teu gued leukly steun.* Fisk dere, yeu tink!"

Sure enough, at my third cast, there was a great boil, and I struck vigorously; so vigorously indeed that something gave, and my line came back without the cast.

I am afraid I assaulted Peter's ears with strange and uncouth oaths. Let us hope that his knowledge of the English vernacular was not sufficient to bear home to him the true significance of the blasphemy.

Nothing further occurred in the way of salmon. It was now as dark as it ever is in those parts, the visibility being about the same as that of an English gloaming on a June evening at nine o'clock p.m. (genuine time).

As we rowed back, I became aware of a great chattering and protesting by the feathered inhabitants of the *felds.* Presently a great red dog-fox, emerged from the undergrowth which fringed the edge of the river, and passing over the stony strand, settled himself for a steady drink. All the time he was thus engaged he was persistently mobbed by a mixed concourse of wagtails and fieldfares; but he took not the slightest notice of their vociferous and ill-mannered execrations.

"If I have gun I sheut'm, yeu tink."

I did not know whether Peter meant the fox or his persecutors. Anyway, it was lucky for either, or both, that no lethal weapon was handy to my boatman's grip.

I may as well, here and now, set forth the sequel to the loss of what was undoubtedly a good fish on this my first essay on Norwegian waters.

To this day I cannot account for the untoward accident which left me empty and bitterly lamenting. As a rule I am not careless in bending on casts or flies. I can only imagine that my excitement and the fading light had caused me to miss an essential twist in the connecting loop.

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* A stone of good luck.

But I got that cast back—also the fly—also the fish, a nineteen pounder!

"Oh, come!" you will exclaim. "Take a pull, Cockie!"

I did take "a pull" (and a very hefty one, to wit), two days later, in a small pool, some three-quarters of a mile above Solem. When this fish came to the gaff, *there was my "black dog." in his upper jaw and the whole length of my cast intact!*

And yet they say that a salmon hooked, or even pricked, will not take again for at least three weeks. Perhaps my joker was that brilliant exception which, so it is said, conveniently lends itself to the demonstration of the rule.

Meanwhile, a day's sport had intervened such as I shall ever remember, so thoroughly sporting and altogether satisfying was it.

The Surendal and its sister river the Sundal, like many other of the comparatively short rivers in Norway, are dependent for their supply of water on the melting snows and glaciers from their common water-shed in the adjacent mountains.

For some time preceding our arrival the skies had been clear and a fierce sun had been ablaze; so that we now found the Surendal in excellent ply.

Needless to say that, on the morning following my disaster in the Solem pöl, I was up betimes and ready to accompany the trusty Peter, whose plan of operations was to proceed to the furthest limit of our stretch and fish the whole of it from end to end. There was a fairly heavy fall some twelve yards below where we were to commence operations. My boatman informed me that when the river was at the height which it now presented, the running fish were apt to take rest in a deepish trench or pocket just above the run. He prophesied that if one or more were there this morning they would be almost sure to respond to my call.

And so it proved, for my very first cast was followed by a lusty boil, but the fish came short; I was not in the humour to allow the traditional ten minutes law; so immediately cast again. No mistake this time. Sure enough, I was fast, and having hauled my captive up-stream, so as to avoid disturbing the rest of the little pool, I managed to bring him well within reach of Peter's deadly steel and soon had the satisfaction of gazing rapturously upon my first Norwegian salmon gasping on the grass, a fresh run fifteen pounder. The hardy Norseman handed me a heavy stone, saying :

" Yeure firs fisk, Meester. Hit him on head yeum-selb, fur gued leuklie ! "

I delivered the *coup de grâce*, and then noticed a ponderous fish bulging on the very edge of the run on its far side. I was fishing with a Durham Ranger of large pattern, and this I managed to drop neatly at exactly the right angle. As it swept round and came into position, the salmon took with a mighty swirl, and again I felt the ecstasy of a tight line !

" Huld 'im, Meester ! Huld 'im ! If he goo deun the fall, yeu'm leuse 'im ! Stor fisk ! (big fish), yeu tink ! "

Easier said than done ! I tried my utmost, but it was no good : the salmon—a whopper—turned tail and was down the shoot like a streak of lightning. My reel screeched and the line ran out yard after yard. I put on the maximum strain my rod would bear, and then held fast. Snap ! bang ! The top straightened and the line slackened. When I wound in, I found that, luckily, my loss was confined to the Durham Ranger.

After indulging in the usual anathemas, I was about to bend on a fly of similar pattern, when Peter intervened :

" I no like that flu," he said. " There's teu many leave on der watter. That dam flu, leuk teu mooch like leaf, yeu tink."

So I altered to a local fly which Colonel Whitmore had particularly recommended ; very like a Silver Doctor, but having a sort of corrugated silver body.

Then we went half-way down the run, where the water was leaping and boiling over the semi-submerged rocks.

" We'm fisk har," said my boatman laconically.

" Oh, hang it all, Peter," I expostulated, " surely you don't expect me to cast over this, with bushes and trees pressing on my back ? "

" No, Meester, you'm goo in bo-at ! "

"Oh, no, you don't!" I exclaimed indignantly. "You don't catch me out in a boat in *that* torrent. Not on your life!"

"It all a-right, Meester. I let yeu'm deun wit' rupe (rope)!"

Even this suggestion failed to appeal to me.

"But my good Peter, do you suppose you can hold me in a boat against such a rush of water?"

"Ai put'm rupe reund tree, and let bo-at deun gentlee."

Well, I was for it now, so I swallowed my qualms and went aboard.

I had to hold on now and then when the old scow bumped a rock; but certainly Peter was an adept at the game, and I soon felt fairly at ease. By this means, I was able to approach several good casts, where the water ran deep and comparatively smooth.

Here I got hold of two nice, fresh run ten pounders. As I became fast in each, Peter pulled in the boat, and I played them from the bank.

The next customer was exceedingly lively and game, though evidently of a lighter weight; but it took a deal of persuasion before it threw up the sponge.

I guessed a grilse, but guessed wrong! It was a fine *sea-trout* of four and a half pounds.

This was excellent and exciting fishing; but I was not altogether sorry when that roaring, rushing drift was done with; for every now and then the thought would obtrude itself: "*Supposing the rope were to break*, or Peter was to have a stroke! Ah! what then!"

There was a wide and open pool below, which looked uncommonly attractive, but the hardy Norseman averred that there was only one cast worth trying. "You'm cast joost above—gued leuklie steun oot thar; p'raps fisk thar—p'raps not."

The fish *was* there. It made a good showing, but failed to attach itself. I cast again without any result, so determined to let the joker rest a few minutes. Next time he came again, and again missed. Then I changed my fly. All to no purpose! But the fish was there, and kept making futile demonstrations.

It "got my goat!"

"Peter," said I, "I mean to have that fish! As long as he keeps rising I shall persist, even if I have to stay here all day and all night."

I tried half a dozen orthodox flies, a black doctor, a Wilkinson, a dusty miller, a thunder and lightning, and a silver doctor. Even the ubiquitous and much belauded Jock Scot failed to tempt him, though he had a good look at it, and at most of the others. I had begun with "Whitmore's Fancy," so I returned to it; but "Mr. Sulky" was not having any.

In despair I bent on a big Irish fly, the name of which was quite unknown to me. It had a brown and yellow wing and a body of some woolly texture, dyed claret colour.

I banged it down with a flop in the right spot, exclaiming:

"There! take that, you obstinate blighter!" And he did! hard and good!

He proved to be a seventeen-pounder, but judging from his colouring he had been some time in the river, and perhaps had had reason to be suspicious of well-known salmon flies.

I brought the stone in contact with the back of his head heartily!

Then we had to drift in the boat some way before reaching *Sün pöl*, which Peter assured me was one of the best in the whole river.

It had to be fished from the boat. I returned to "Whitmore's Fancy." We drifted some way before Peter "gave me the office."

"Gued leuklie steun—two casts in front. Yeu'm rise fisk, yeu tink!" (Please note that my excellent boatman persisted in saying "Yeu tink" (*you* think) instead of "Ai tink" (*I* think). "Next cast he'm cum."

Sure enough he did.

The water was extraordinarily pellucid, and of a delicate green tint. I distinctly saw the fish (he seemed to me a veritable leviathan) shoot up from behind a big submerged boulder, and boil right over my fly with a perfect head and tail rise. The next instant he turned and my line tightened.

"Stor fisk, yeu tink?"

"A thirty-pounder, I believe!" I shouted exultantly. "Row away quick; he's coming towards us up-stream!"

Peter acted promptly. By his clever manœuvring of the scow, I soon had the fish under reasonable control, so that my boatman was able to pull in to the bank, where I landed and continued the battle, which was a dour and grim one. I had to shin it over the rocky strand for over two hundred yards and back again several times before Peter waded in and deftly struck with the gaff.

It was a beautiful fish, absolutely fresh run, with the sea-lice still adhering to its silvery sides.

But it turned out to be of less *avoirdupois* than I had guessed when it took. In fact it was just twenty-six pounds, but up to then by far the biggest salmon I had ever accounted for. I was in a seventh heaven of joy!

I touched another salmon in the same pool and caught a very handsome fish, which Peter said was a trout which had dropped down-stream from the lake above, during the flood.

Never before or since have I seen a *fario* of its like. It was three pounds in weight, and a lovely specimen—a bright yellow, the tone of golden sand, with vivid red spots along its flanks, and having rich brown fins and tail!

No, it was *not* a char!

Peter said there were plenty like it in the lake from which the river emerged.

I made a mental reservation to visit that lake, but somehow or other I never found the opportunity. Sport continued too good in the river to admit of problematical excursions.

We now passed a most likely-looking pool. I expected Peter to give me the word to recommence, but to my surprise he kept pushing the scow down-stream.

"Don't I fish here?" I asked.

"No gued, Meester; no fisk never caught har."

I said nothing, but wondered why.

Further down, I had another sea-trout, a beauty of seven pounds, and a grilse of five pounds (an early arrival); but no more salmon until we were over the "gued leuklie steun" of Solem pöl. Here I was fast in a hefty twenty-pounder, which gave me a real tough battle. I landed on the right bank; whereupon he ran right over to the opposite one, where he kept coasting up and down utterly refusing to come over into mid-stream. It had all my line and half the "backing" out. When at last it showed signs of fatigue, it kept rolling over and over, and thus managed to wrap the whole of the cast around its gills and body. So I had to lug it (or rather her—for it proved to be a hen-fish) by main force across the broad stretch of river before she was safely impaled. This also was a perfectly fresh run fish.

Thus ended our day. I think you will agree that it was a thoroughly sporting one, and such as offered a happy augury for the rest of our stay.

On Sunday, Peter was not available; whether it was on account of religious scruples, or because he had celebrated our sport of the previous day not wisely but too well, I am unable to say with exactitude.

Not having such scruples, or such leaden-headed oppression (as the case might be), myself, I was keen on exploiting the Sabbath on "the better the day the better the deed" principle. I had carefully noted several very likely-looking nooks and corners in the river, which Peter had passed by contemptuously as being "No gued, yeu tink." These could be easily fished from the bank, so I was determined to explore them.

As previously mentioned, I was greatly enamoured of one particular pool which my trusty Norseman had condemned as "no earthly." On the far side of this the banks were high and overhanging. What looked to me like a most inviting "lie" for fish was thus overshadowed—the stream running deep and dark. On the *hüs* side there was a shelving beach with a sprit of sand running out almost to mid-stream; so that by taking my stand thereon I was able to cover the whole of the pool. Whilst fixing up, I was overjoyed to see an undoubted salmon bulge under the opposite bank.

To enter into minute details of how I struck, played and landed my catch in this despised pool would only weary you; suffice it to say that, without moving from one spot, I gaffed two salmon (fifteen pounds and eleven pounds), three grilse (averaging four and a half pounds), and a nice sea-trout (two and a half pounds), the last named being the first victim to succumb. Another salmon I held only momentarily, and I lost a three-pound sea-trout when trying to hand-haul him to the beach. So much for Peter's condemnation of this excellent little pitch !

I have come to the conclusion that such pools are condemned by natives because years ago they had proved unprolific. Then certain floods in after times had probably so altered the flow of the stream and the conformation of its sides and bottom as to provide enticing resting-holes and trenches for the fish. But not having had the hardihood to further test pools which had been all along regarded as "wash-outs," the said natives had continued to harbour the same archaic prejudice, greatly to their loss.

Peter was dumb with amazement when he beheld what I had pulled out of his pet aversion.

Whilst awarding one of the salmon "the royal order of the knock" a blue scarab tie-pin—a genuine antique—presented to me with great ceremony by an illustrious Egyptologist as a sure amulet against ill-luck and a marvellous mascot for the successful wooing of the fickle goddess Fortune, came loose, and lost itself in the flotsam and jetsam which strewed the beach. Search as I would, I could find no trace of it. At last I gave it up as a bad job.

I am not a superstitious person, but somehow the loss of this pin greatly perturbed me.

The very next day, when fishing *Solem pöl,* Öle Larsen, our boy of all work, brought me a telegram. As I tore open the envelope I presaged trouble. It was from a sister-in-law in Hampshire, who was looking after my youngest son Lionel—then but three years of age—announcing that my child had contracted *diphtheria* and was in parlous state !

Thus was I at a moment's notice plunged from the genial glow of sporting enthusiasm into a state of agonized misery and suspense. Of course my first thought was how to get back to the little one ; but there was no boat for five days ! Well, I knew the deadly swiftness of the horrible disease. I had lost one little sister (Alicia) by its lethal attack ; another sister (Ada) had only just pulled through ; whilst I myself had had a severe dose of the distemper. What was I to do ? I sent Bedford, hot foot, to telegraph to my sister-in-law, begging her to keep me posted by wire until I could cross the North Sea.

Then came two days of excruciating suspense. Hoping for the best and dreading the worst, I tried to divert my mind by fishing in a desultory fashion: but there was no heart—no smallest thrill of excitement in my endeavour. The third day another telegram arrived. I—I held my breath, and my heart beat heavily as I opened it.

God be praised! This is how it ran:

"Lionel out of danger—doing well. Stay where you are. Make mind easy. Will report.—NONNA."

You may well imagine my relief and fervent thankfulness.

I set to work with renewed energy and enthusiasm.

One day I had twenty fish—a mixed take of seven salmon (one twenty-one pounds, the others averaging fourteen pounds), six grilse, five sea-trout and a couple of two-pound "brownies."

But sport was not always up to this standard. In fact, by about the middle of July the snows in the water-shed were exhausted, and the Surendal began to run low, so that, apart from *Solem pöl,* there were very few pools fishable with any hope of success.

I kept picking up salmon, grilse and sea-trout here and there sporadically; nevertheless, by the end of the month, when my tenancy came to an end, my tally of fish of all denominations was only just short of a hundred—nothing marvellous, but a real good time for one rod, under such thoroughly sporting circumstances and glorious surroundings.

One word more about "Billy."

Shortly after his dastardly murder of the perky Lars and Öle, and the summary punishment which then overtook him, he was accompanying me in a stroll on the felds, when he suddenly wilted and rushed into a thicket of wild raspberries.

I could not imagine what was to do with the little rascal, until, hearing a raucous croak, I looked up and beheld a

" hoodie " crow sitting on the top of an adjacent fir! Then I understood. Billy had no use whatever for " hoodies " or any other member of the *Corvidæ*—no, sir—not on your life!

Even when the hoodoo bird of ill-omen had departed with a derisive croak, Billy refused to budge; so I had to crawl into his lair and lift him bodily from it.

CHAPTER XIX

AT various periods of my strenuous life, I have arrived at certain crises of a more or less devastating character. On one such occasion, being "all torn out," brokenhearted, and on the verge of neurasthenia, a "*Deus ex machina*" appeared in the person of my cousin and partner, Ted Jaquet, who was accompanied by his gentle wife Ida.

"Look here, Cockie, old chap," he said, "this won't do. Unless you take a pull we shall have you carted off to the nearest lunatic asylum before you know where you are. Ida and I have put our heads together and have decided to whisk you off to sunnier and more congenial climes, where, amid new surroundings and plenty of sport, you are bound to find respite and nepenthe from harrowing memories."

Well, I was much too weak and distressed to argue the matter, even had I felt so inclined. On the contrary, my weary soul saw a glimmer of light through the drab clouds of my despair; so I jumped at the proposition with alacrity and thankfulness.

Behold us then, three weeks later, at Ismailia, with the addition to the party of my cousin's dinky little daughter—my godchild, Phyllis—(at that time about nine years of age)—plus my redoubtable valet, Thomas Bedford, who was then a widower with only a vague inclination to resume matrimonial amenities by taking the fatal oath of allegiance to the fair Flora, our most admirable cook.

It was about 3 a.m. when we set foot on the ramshackle landing-stage, having been conveyed thither by a steam launch from the good ship *Oroya*. We adjourned to the only likely looking hotel, situated within a stone's throw of the wharf. We had not retired to "rest" (save the mark!)

more than a few minutes before loud lamentations arose. Doors were flung open, whilst dishevelled and weirdly clad forms rushed forth pell-mell into the night. There had been a simultaneous attack on our vile bodies by swarms of active and voracious vermin; whereupon, what was at first only a strategic retreat, "according to plan," soon degenerated into a royal rout. It was a case of "*Sauve qui peut.*"

The first faint streaks of dawn were gilding the East. All we could do was to wander aimlessly up and down the dusty road in front of the "House of Pain." I found this peregrination somewhat monotonous; so being thoroughly fed-up, I left the rest of my contingent to gang their weary gait, and strolled down to the water-side and on to the landing-stage. Here I found a group of little "Gyppies" busily engaged in the gentle art of Isaac Walton. The water being clear as crystal, I was able to spot—here and there—shoals of fish of some sort disporting themselves at a depth of about three feet.

The paraphernalia of the infantile anglers was decidedly primitive; consisting, as it did, of a pole of sugar-cane, to the end of which was attached a line of about six feet in length, composed of some kind of fibre, plus a foot of twisted horsehair, and a formidable hook. The bait was supplied by strips of flesh, flayed from the corpse of a venturesome fish, which by some means or other had been secured. The usual demand for "Baksheesh" was immediately forthcoming. Here I may interpolate that, by general consent, it is laid down that the first word one *hears* on setting foot on the land of the Pharaohs is that same word "Baksheesh," and that the first word it is essential to *learn* is "Imshi," which, being freely translated, signifies "Get out," or less politely, though more forcibly, "Go to hell!"

Having distributed a few piastres among the dusky brats, I proceeded to commandeer the most likely looking of their engines of war, and commenced operations forthwith.

As these fish, which were apparently of the mullet tribe and of herring dimensions, were probably angled for day in and day out, and very likely by night as well, they were naturally somewhat diffident about accepting the lure which

I presented to them; however, by devious devices which were a revelation to the little "Gyppies," I managed to extract half a dozen fishlets from their native element; whereupon the native nippers signified supreme surprise and delight. In this fashion I managed to smooth the passing hours pleasantly enough until it was time to join my disgruntled relatives, in order to catch the early train to Cairo.

A propos my indulgence in this mild form of angling, I was subsequently told that Lake Timsa (crocodile) swarmed with fish of various species; some of them of colossal dimensions, and that had I grasped the opportunity of chartering a native boat and setting about the business seriously, with less primitive tackle than the little fishermen were able to provide, I might have enjoyed some really delectable sport.

But Cairo was our objective, so I had to leave such an adventure to the nebulous "some day" (which I believe is a sort of relation to "one day"), an intention which, as it happens, has never materialized.

After a sumptuous repast at Shepheard's Hotel, we sat on the historic veranda, and gazed with open-mouthed astonishment and interest at the passing pageant of oriental life. It was all new to us, and we were enthralled by the spectacle. But many potent pens have from time to time busied themselves in depicting the extraordinary variety of "local colour" which endlessly passes along before the eyes of the observer; so that I need not trespass further on a description, which, even when painted by the most imaginative scribe, fails to convey any really satisfying impression of the riot of colour, movement and variety which unfolds itself to the eye from this point of vantage.

It was not long before a gorgeously attired Dragoman, or Shikari, approached me with lordly bearing. He made a deep salaam.

"Ba-sha want go shooting? Blenty sport, berhaps!"

"Perhaps not!" This *sotto voce* from Ted.

Our Arab friend had sharp ears.

"You tink *not*—I tink *yes*," he exclaimed scornfully. Then turning to me whom he evidently recognized as being in command:

"What Ba-sha tink?"

"Well," said I, "I am always ready for a bit of sport. If you—whoever you may be—can show us any, I'm game!"

The stately stranger drew himself up to his full height, which was all of six feet and a bit over!

"My name Farag Hamedieh," he announced loftily. "I known best Shikari, all Egypt. I take you what sport you like: snipes, duckses, anyting! If you like you go up Nile in Dahabieh—all way Assouan."

"Well, let's shoot a snipe to begin with," put in Ted. "Where can we find one?"

"Blenty snipe, En Chasse; also blenty Tel-el-Kabir. You come along?"

"What! this instant minute?" exclaimed my ponderous pal, with well-feigned astonishment.

"Ayouah! (yes). If you like!"

"No, but I don't like," said I. "You are in too great a hurry, Farag. Let us say the day after to-morrow."

"*Taëb!* (good). I have him all ready. *Saïda* (good-evening), Ba-sha!" and away stalked the majestic one.

He was as good as his word; for he appeared at the station on the appointed day, with a motley retinue of Fellaheen to act as carriers, retrievers and beaters; or to take up any other old job that might come their way, at the price of two kroners per head per diem. The aforesaid En Chasse was our objective that day, and here we had some fair sport with the snipe, gathering about a dozen couples. I was much interested in watching the vultures and *falconidæ,* which were in great quantities, and—as regards the latter birds—of many species. Also, I was greatly amused by watching the antics of a large Egyptian mongoose, which was sporting with his inamorata outside a high bed of reeds, into which the amorous ones retreated as soon as they became aware of the presence of the dreaded human. The rag-tag and bobtail of our following beat out the cover thoroughly, but never a sign of the sinuous animals was seen again.

A week later, Farag took us to Tel-el-Kebir, where the great battle, which ended in the downfall of Arabi Pasha, was fought. The marshes here had a bottom of very stiff and sticky clay; so that the going was anything but pleasant. There were plenty of snipe, but they were very wild and wary. Among those which found their way into our bag was a specimen of the *painted snipe*, a handsome bird, which I had never before seen in the flesh.

Presently we came to a string of lagoons, dotted over with rush-grown islets. There were a great many duck about, mostly mallard and tufted; but, like the snipe, they took wing long before we were within shot; so it became necessary to put in force stalking operations.

I was wading up to my knees, with a view to taking up position on a tuft of rushes in the middle of the water, when, on reaching this and about to seat myself comfortably thereon, there was a loud hiss, and a sort of "Jack-in-the-box" demonstration, as *a huge yellow cobra* uncoiled itself and slithered into the water. I do not know which was the most startled, I or that darned snake. Had he decided to coil himself and strike, as is the lethal custom of its horrible kind, assuredly it would have been all up with your Uncle Cockie; but, thank goodness, he slipped off smoothly—on the "safety first" principle, I suppose. As soon as ever I could recover my nerve, I let him have the contents of my first barrel; but he dived under water and disappeared, just in time to save his glittering skin. I am sure I didn't want to see him again, dead or alive!

The tactics we employed against the duck had no material result; only one wretched "tufter" falling to a fluky shot of Ted's. But in an adjacent lagoon we had some lively sport with the coots, which swarmed on its surface and among its reed-beds. It was very shallow, so we formed a line, and waded its full length. The birds swam before us until they were hemmed in between our line of beaters and the far edge of the lagoon. Then they rose and streamed back over our heads, affording us some very lively shooting. Quite a score were accounted for, and as these bald-headed birds do not lend themselves kindly to the culinary art, we made a handsome present of them to our tatterdemalion army. Later, we were surprised to find that the ungrateful varlets had thrown them away. On asking Farag the reason of this wasteful demonstration, he informed us that it was against the Mohammedan tenets to eat of the flesh of any bird or animal that had not had its blood drained ere life is extinct.

It was about this time that I suddenly found that my gold repeater watch, which had been a present to me from my dear departed mother, on the occasion of my twenty-first birthday, was missing. At first I suspected that one of the units of our picturesque bunch of natives was an expert pickpocket, though cunningly camouflaged as an innocent fellah; but after thinking out every place and position where I might have dropped the timepiece, my thoughts suddenly recurred to my snake adventure; so a dusky member of the party was dispatched to the tuft, which was now over a mile away. Sure enough, on the very spot where that obscene reptile had lain sunning itself, lay the derelict watch, all safe and sound, and correctly indicating the hour (5 p.m.), a hint which caused us hurriedly to seek the station, *en route* for Cairo, home and beauty.

Farag did not seem to have many further suggestions for sporting days within easy reach of the capital, but proposed that we should fit out a camping expedition near the lakes of Fayoum. I cannot say that I was particularly keen on carrying out such exalted ideas, because our Shikari's description of the game did not appeal to me very convincingly. For when I asked him what varieties of game might be expected in those parts, his reply was:

"Ba-sha shoot jackal, berhaps!"

"Anything else?" I asked.

"Maybe someting."

"Yes, but what?" I insisted.

"Bigeons, berhaps." And that was all I could get out of him.

However, Ted thought it would be a novelty. But on reconsidering the question, my cousin came to the conclusion that such a wild adventure would not be suitable to the delicate Ida. And since he was averse from leaving her and Phyllis to the perils of Cairo—I did not press him, being myself far from enthusiastic—though hankering after a new experience. So, for the time being, we gave the proposition "a miss in baulk."

Farag, having failed in his endeavour to lure us into the wilds, would not leave me in peace until he had persuaded me to charter a Dahabieh for the purpose of sailing up the Nile to a problematical destination. And so it came about that my Arab friend and I found ourselves, one fine morning, in the office of the British Consul, where an agreement was drawn up between us for the catering and general fitting-out of this aquatic expedition. When it came to Farag's turn to affix his sign-manual, which he proposed to do with the impress of a scarab ring, the Consul looked him sternly in the face, and then turned to me, exclaiming:

"This man is an impostor! His papers have either been forged or stolen; he *is not Farag Hamedieh!*"

The object of the alleged misrepresentation threw up his eyes and hands with an expression of injured innocence.

"True, Ba-sha, I not Farag; I Hassanein. Farag, my brudder, all same ting, same papers, same mudder, same fader——"

"Oh, but it's not the same thing, you rascal!" roared the outraged Consul; then turning to me: "This man has fooled you properly, Captain Cox; but if you like to take him on at his face value—unprepossessing though it be—that is *your* look-out; but don't say I haven't warned you!"

To tell you the truth, the man's colossal impudence rather tickled my fancy; besides, I had grown to look upon him as a priceless scream. He appealed to my sense of humour, and we had all grown to look upon him as our indispensable guide, philosopher and friend.

So the day came when we set foot on an archaic vessel grandiloquently yclept *The Cleopatra*. Our crew was a motley one, consisting of a polyglot collection, in which many races were represented.

Fellaheen of Egypt, ebony-visaged Soudanese, Arabs of the Pyramids, half-castes, and other weird specimens of the human race. Our head-steward, one Abu Zed, professed to being half Turk and half Soudanese. He was a perfect figure of fun, and a delightful character, a source of never-ending joy and amusement to us all. His brother Ali was our cook—something of a *chef*, believe me; but we found it expedient not to inquire too closely into the materials and methods which he exploited in the culinary art. Ali was as black as your hat, whilst Abu was as yellow as a lemon, which caused one to harbour some doubt as to the strict virtue of their common mother.

One evening, when Diana had hung her lamp in full glory in the heavens, I strolled with Abu to the lower deck, where I nearly fell over what at first I took to be a bundle of rags. On receiving the shock of my boot, the mass assumed animation, and revealed itself in the person of Ali.

"What on earth is he doing?" I inquired of my companion.

"It is de Ali, my brudder de cook—him fishin'."

I was interested, so proceeded to watch the operations; but nothing happened. I found that the dusky one was baiting with the entrails of a chicken. Apparently he had several bites, for ever and anon he would strike vigorously, but no tightening of the thick cord, which did duty for a line, supervened. I ran to that which was by courtesy called a state-room, and ferreted out my roach-rod and such tackle as I could lay my hands on, which, anyhow, had a decided bulge on Ali's outfit. Back again, I soon rigged up my armament and set to work. Soon enough, a vigorous "rug" informed me that fish of some sort were on the job; but for a time I was no more successful than had been our ebon-visaged cook. Anon, a vigorous signal caused me to strike hard and good; whereupon I found myself fast in something of considerable weight. A severe struggle ensued. At last the creature, whatever it was, came floundering to the surface, where its contortions caused wavelets and ripples that glittered like molten silver in the moonlight. For a moment I thought I was foul of a bull-frog; for my victim began voicing raucous croaks and gurglings. When it was hauled on board, it proved to be a catfish of some five pounds, a most horrific object, with walrus-like whiskers, and bearing in its grotesque countenance a striking resemblance to Abu himself.

Later, I captured another strange and repulsive-looking specimen of the piscatorial productions of the Nile. More like a Japanese giant salamander than a self-respecting fish! Abu told me its native name, and declared that it was "*taib*" (good), but I left it at that!

Next day Ali served up a dish which I regarded with more than suspicion; but the rest of the party, who had not seen the raw material "*in statu naturæ*," were evidently highly pleased with the gastronomic delicacy, Ted actually indulging in three helpings. I watched him anxiously for the rest of the evening, but as he seemed to retain his normal health and displayed no alarming symptoms, my fears for his corporeal welfare were finally allayed.

One day, when "Sallie," the Soudanese cabin-boy, was plucking some quail which we had shot during one of our land expeditions, the feathers were gently wafted overboard. As they drifted down-stream, I noticed that some sort of fish were persistently rising at them. This gave me a brain-wave. So I tried my hand at fly-tying, and, after much travail, succeeded in producing a weird lure, with which I captured several fish of a species which Abu informed me were known in the vernacular as "Shelbeh." They were almost transparent, with eyes set high in the head and curiously pedunculated. As regards these fish, I had no qualms in accepting Abu's declaration as to their quality, when Ali had duly dealt with them. In fact, they were excellent food.

Sallie (goodness only knows what his native patronymic was, but Sallie we dubbed him, and Sallie he remained), a full-blooded Soudanese of about fourteen years of age, with a flat countenance, which shone like polished ebony, was told off as bodyguard to the little Phyllis, and right well did he carry out his duties.

Our "entourage," if not a thing of beauty, was a joy for ever. In the first place, there was the artful but majestic Hassanein himself, as priceless a rascal as ever lined his pockets at the expense of his employer; a perfect specimen of the ancient type of Egypt, which has not materially changed since the earlier dynasties of that land of antiquity and mystery. His smile was as the sun's ray, and his suavity (except when dealing with a recalcitrant donkey-boy) soothing and restful in the extreme.

Abu Zed, our steward, I have already introduced. Quite a character this. His head was much too big for his body, whilst his nose looked as if it had been dumped on warm and had run! The *reis* (captain) was a dignified looking person, in turban and long burnous, who would have scored several points to the " beaver " hunter of 1922. He was a perfect martinet, and kept the "*Olla-podrida*" strictly to their duties. But one day a certain young Arab, whom we had named " Handsome Hassan," owing to his Apollo-like features and elegant form, got the good *reis's* " wind up," having failed to conform to the strict rules of Ramadan, the great Mohammedan fast, which was then toward; he being of the more modern—and looser—cult of Egypt. Naturally, I was not much impressed by the indictment of his backslidings, but the majority of the crew—being of the strictly orthodox persuasion—insisted on the unfortunate " knut " being marooned, failing which, they declared their intention of going on strike and leaving us to shift for ourselves. This was moral blackmail with a vengeance, but it proved irresistible; so, on the principle that " the greatest good is for the greatest number," the wretched Hassan was then and there put on shore. When I inquired of Farag (*alias* Hassanein) how the unfortunate fellow would find his way back to Cairo, our dragoman's lip curled.

" He not find way back. Fuzzi-wuzzis find him; kill him all right."

This was a startler! Had I not had reason to doubt the accuracy of my informant's statements on many occasions, my conscience would have smitten me sorely and the blood of " Handsome Hassan " might have called for vengeance on my devoted head.

Later on, when we had returned to Cairo, I discovered that the derelict and attractive Arab had not only arrived in safety at the city, but, on the way, had gathered unto himself a well-endowed wife as well as various flocks and herds, which he had probably stolen.

I have not said much about our shooting activities during this adventurous voyage since there was not very much to say, except as regards quail. These had begun to show in considerable quantities soon after our arrival in Cairo, and we had then some excellent days in the Pyramid district.

On one occasion we were shooting through a field of grain when a brown owl arose in front of the line. It was not fired at, but being evidently scared out of its wits, it gave a sudden twist in the air and fell to the ground. When we picked it up we found that its left wing was broken at the first pinion. Never have I come across any sportsman who had witnessed a similar casualty.

When the quail were flushed in quantities, the *falconidæ* of various species became very busy. As the little birds rose, the hawks would stoop to them, just out of reach of the guns, and many a victim did we see so struck. A curious incident occurred when one day a quail rose about twenty yards in front of Ted. As he threw up his gun, a small hawk dashed from behind him without his seeing it. It struck the quail just as my cousin fired, and the two birds were killed. The hawk was one of those pretty little French-grey hen-harriers. I had it set up to grace my collection in "Old Blighty." Another time we were beating out a lentil field, in which several sacks of some dressing for the land were scattered about. Ted let off at a quail, when one of these apparently inanimate objects jumped up with a loud yell! No sack this, but an unfortunate fellah who had received a peppering of my companion's shot in the most prominent part of his person. Naturally, the shooter was in a terrible state of mind, but Farag soon put matters right by shaking the victim roughly by the shoulders, and pouring out a string of invectives, which it was as well, perhaps, that we could not translate. When we asked him what he had said to the wounded man, his reply was:

"I tell him I kick him with stick if he make any more noise. I say Ba-sha furious, for he get in the way."

This was all very well, but tender-hearted Ted would not allow our Shikari to get away with it. So, approaching his victim, he pressed several substantial coins into his ready palm; whereupon Farag and the "casualty" had another wordy interchange. Again being asked to interpret, our dragoman announced :

" Oh, he very much pleased ; say you have another shot at him if you like. He say, ' Allah be praised ! May Ba-sha live long and have many wives.' "—Ida was *not* present !

On this particular voyage we did not get very far up the Nile ; for ever and anon the good ship *Cleopatra* would charge the bank, and then there was a devil of a to-do among the crew. I went so far as to dignify them by the names of sailors, but Abu wouldn't have it. Inflating his widespread nostrils, he scornfully assured me that they were not sailors at all, but a lot of low-down donkey-boys, who had been scraped up by Farag from the streets and bazaars of Cairo.

At other times we would run on to a sandbank in mid-stream, where we had to remain in solitary grandeur for hours together, while the said " donkey-boys," tucking their jibbehs around their loins, would plunge into the water and attempt to prise the old hulk from her undesirable and impromptu moorings. At last, in despair, I asked Abu when we were likely to reach Wasta. His reply was instructive, but not altogether lucid.

" Ba-sha hab it is de bath. Shoot de belligans ; come it is back ; hab it is de breakfast ; be zoon gummin ! " which I took to mean that if I had a bath and went out in the dinghy for the purpose of enfilading the pelicans (which occasionally lined the sandbanks), came back and had breakfast, we might —with ordinary luck—be somewhere within hail of Wasta, where we hoped to reprovision and to investigate that ancient village with a day's quail shooting thrown in.

Talking of baths. On my first morning on board I was much puzzled by the manner in which Abu announced that my bath was prepared. With much importance, he came to my cabin and apparently asked me a question.

" Ba-sha, *is bath ready ?* "

" Really, Abu," I replied, " I am sure I don't know ! Surely it is *your* business to find out ? "

He repeated the question and then signed to me to follow him. Sure enough, the bath, with all its appurtenances, was faithfully prepared.

" Why did you ask me if the bath was ready ? " I inquired curiously. Abu salaamed.

" I tell Ba-sha, *is bath ready ?* "

Then it dawned upon me that our head steward's method of making *an announcement* was to adopt the vocal inflection of *interrogation.* So for the future, when I wanted to know if I could proceed to my ablutions, I would say :

" Abu, bath *is* ready," and he would invariably reply :

" Ba-sha, *is bath ready ?* "

Then I knew that everything was in order !

One day, early in the morning, I sighted a large flock of pelicans—about a hundred in number—busy on the bank, about two hundred yards away from the Dahabieh, as she sailed up stream. As they didn't move, I threw up my Winchester and let drive. The great birds rose with a loud clatter. As they did so, I pumped in another shot on the off chance, and was pleasantly surprised to see a bird fall in the water, whilst the victim of my first shot lay dead on the sandbank. The second one did not appear to be much the worse for its impromptu dive, for it started to swim off down stream at a surprising pace. Ted, Farag, and a couple of the " donkey-boys " jumped into a small boat and followed it. But it was only after an exciting chase for a couple of miles that they overhauled the bag-billed bird, and took it aboard, when I found that my bullet had shattered the second pinion of its wing. We put it out of its misery and fetched the dead one from the bank. One of the crew, a Soudanese, who fancied himself as a bit of a taxidermist, skinned the pelican quite cleverly ; but such an odour was created that we had to vacate the *Cleopatra* and amuse ourselves on shore as best we could for the rest of the day.

Eventually these pelicans were converted into lamp-holders, and became conspicuous ornaments in my hall at Cassiolridge, where they remained until disintegrated by a succession of mischievous retriever pups.

Thousands of duck, of many varieties, were to be seen any day drifting along the edges of the Nile. But all our attempts to bring them to book were unsuccessful, though now and then a vagrant bird would fall a victim to our guns.

As for the main army of "canards," as soon as we approached them, the rear battalions would rise and fly to the head of the column. These relay tactics went on continually—always leaving a hiatus between ourselves and the rearmost birds. Now it struck me that certain manœuvres might be employed, which, if meticulously carried out, would result in a perfect holocaust of feather. On my return to Cairo, I figured it all out; but as I was unable to prolong my stay on this occasion, I laid my scheme before several sporting friends of mine at the Khedival Club. Some time later I heard that an expedition had been carried out on the lines which I had laid down, and that it had met with really wonderful results.

This is what happened.

About two miles above where the large army of duck was stationed, a line of "hides" was erected, some three hundred yards apart. These were manned by the shooters. In all, there were about twenty of these "O. Pips." Then another section of the attackers gradually approached the rear of the enemy column in a boat. The duck behaved exactly as before—when my friends and I had vainly attempted to outwit them. A section—about a hundred yards in length and containing about two hundred birds—rose from the water and flew to the head of the column, where they alighted. As the boat continued to approach, another section moved, taking wing in the same way. In this manner the whole string, consisting of thousands of duck of many varieties, were brought parallel to the line of "hides." At a given signal a deadly fusillade was opened upon the serried ranks. The birds, quite disorganized, then flew wildly hither and thither, affording extraordinary sport. At the end of the day over five hundred duck were, I believe, accounted for.

Another raid, on the same lines, was carried out a few weeks later; but this time only about a hundred were victimized; whilst a third attempt ended in failure, since the duck, becoming wise to the tactics, no longer moved *up* river; but, as soon as the boat was seen approaching, rose in a body, and flew off *down* stream, quite out of shot.

We did not tarry long at Wasta; for, after inspecting all that was to be seen of interest in the locality, and being by now thoroughly fed up with our crew of "donkey-boys," we held a council of war, the upshot of which was that I gave the order, "About ship!" and the *Cleopatra* gracefully slewing round, was allowed to drift majestically down stream, until at last the Kasr-en-Nil hove in sight. For the rest of our days in the land of Pharaoh we contented ourselves with the pleasures and entertainments of Cairo, and with the enjoyment of the more *recherché* flesh-pots of Egypt.

CHAPTER XX

ONLY twelve months had rolled by, when, for the second time, I found myself nearing the land of the Pyramids, though in somewhat different company. Ted, of course, was one of the party, but *vice* Ida and my god-daughter Phyllis, were installed my C.O. and her mother. Instead of landing at Ismailia as before, we gave that verminous port a wide berth and proceeded to Cairo, via Alexandria. But, before landing at the latter city, my eyes had been delighted by the sight of the irrepressible Hassanein (or Farag), who came out to the ship in a native boat. His expressive grin on viewing me was a sight for the gods. As soon as we had exchanged greetings, he inquired eagerly whether I had brought him the gold watch and chain and the double-barrelled gun which I " had promised him." As I had *not* promised him anything of the sort, I told him there was " nothing doing." Seeing that his bluff had failed, he made the best of a bad job, and resumed his normal attitude of superiority. But do you suppose that we were to escape his toils ? Not on your life ! He had made up his mind that the time had come when a Nile voyage to Assouan was *sine qua non*. The copper-coloured rascal had already chartered the cranky old *Cleopatra* with Abu, Sallie, the *Reis*, and others of the old bunch, together with various new " donkey-boys " whom he had engaged or " Shanghaied." So there was nothing for it but to bow to the inevitable. However, we had a few days' respite, and as there was a large number of quail round about the Pyramids we made up our minds to enjoy such sport as we could get out of these gamesome little birds. We found them so plentiful that one evening, after dinner, I began bucking about what I could do with them ; whereupon I was challenged by a sporting friend, who offered to bet me "a pony" that I would not bag fifty couples to my own gun in a single day. Now I figured that this was easy money, so immediately accepted the wager.

The very next day I started off with Hassanein & Co. and a whole army of beaters. I began operations about a mile wide of the Mena House, and was soon busy on my mission of slaughter. Everything went well up to the time when we knocked off for rest and refreshment under the locust trees. I had by then thirty-seven couples of quail, so I began to figure out how I should invest that twenty-five pounds. When we started again, the little birds came quickly to hand. These "gyppies" are wonders at marking a fallen quail; but in the lentils, beans and other dense-growing cereals a great many were necessarily overlooked.

By and by I became conscious of a dense gloom which was overshadowing the heavens. The blazing sun had disappeared, and I could see that the natives were gazing apprehensively at the overcast sky. All of a sudden the clouds opened, and a terrific downpour descended. Such a phenomenon was almost an unknown thing during the dry season; consequently my dusky army took it as a portent of impending doom. One and all gathered their flowing garments about them, took to their heels, and scampered for all they were worth to the native village about a mile distant, leaving me in solitary grandeur, planted in the middle of the plain. I had counted up the tally to this point, and made out that there were just forty-three couples in the bag.

Drenched to the skin, I made my way sloppily on the line of retreat of my routed army, but on arrival at the village I utterly failed to induce more than three or four of the more venturesome beaters to renew the attack. These were only able to spring an occasional bird, for the quail evidently objected to risking flight under the damp circumstances; so it happened that when "Time" was called I found myself three couples short of the stipulated tally; whereby I lost my bet and caught an infernally bad cold, which did not leave me until we were well on our way up the Nile.

Again we made our first stop at Wasta. Here the Sheikh of the village of Maidoum, which lies hard by "the false pyramids," came to the dahibyeh to pay his respects. He was a majestic "beaver," with a jet-black beard, and of saturnine though aristocratic countenance. He suggested that, on the following day, we should grant him the courtesy of a return visit; when, so he protested, he would entertain us royally at lunch, and provide us with sport in the shape of a pigeon battue.

Now I had been gravely warned that this same village of Maidoum was a "bad" one, and that Europeans who ventured within its precincts were in peril of having "rough stuff" handed out to them by the Sheikh's "gentle" subjects. Nevertheless, we determined to risk the adventure, having regard to the ancient fiction that those who partake of an Arab's salt are held sacred both as regards their persons and their property.

Behold, then, our whole party, mounted on the inevitable donkeys, wending our way to Maidoum, which, as events turned out, was nigh to proving "my doom" and that of the whole of my domestic bunch!

Arrived at our destination, we were ushered into the presence of the Sheikh, who received us with deep salaams, and every expression of goodwill and hospitality.

A lamb, roasted whole and stuffed with chestnuts, raisins and other succulent ingredients, was served up for our delectation. No forks, spoons, or other implements of gustation were provided for our use; the Arab custom being to claw the carcase and tear off tit-bits with bare fingers.

The messy feast having been brought to a conclusion, the Sheikh invited us to adjourn to the outskirts of the village, where there was a large pond to which continuous streams of pigeons came in flocks of from seven to a dozen at a time to slake their thirst. Ted was posted on the far side of this piece of water, whilst I was on that abutting on the village; the ladies being posted under the shade of a mud wall some three hundred yards distant.

I had expected the Sheikh to accompany us; but he made the excuse that he had business of state to deal with, though he hoped that—when we were surfeited with slaughter—we would return and take coffee with him. At the same time, he sent with us a posse of his body-guards—armed with long rifles—to act as an escort. Now this struck me as being a rather quaint move! The warning which I had received recurred to my mind, and I wondered why "His Duskiness" had taken this precaution.

We were soon to learn!

The "rocks" quickly put in an appearance, so we were kept busy; but we had not been engaged in our fusillade more than a quarter of an hour, when we became aware that excursions and alarums were toward. First of all, the women and children began to encroach on our positions, and every time a pigeon fell they would raise loud wails and lamentations, snatching up the sand from the ground, casting it in the air, and letting it fall on their dusky heads. Then the male portion of the community surged out, and so surrounded us that we could not continue our shooting. They pressed closer and closer, and it soon became evident, from their menacing cries and gesticulations, that they had the wind well up, and meant mischief.

"What's all this rumpus?" I asked Hassanein. "What are they talking about?"

"Someping," was our Shikari's terse reply.

"Yes, you fool! I know it's *something*, but *what?*"

"They say tings!"

"I know, I know; but *what* are they saying?"

"They not want you shoot bigeon."

"Well, why on earth wasn't I told?"

"The Sheikh say shoot bigeon, never mind beople!"

"But I *do* mind. We'll chuck it up? Go and tell Basha Jaquet to come here at once!"

Easier said than done! The lusty Ted was so densely surrounded by howling natives that he was difficult of approach.

Now a diversion occurred. The Sheikh's body-guard went bald-headed for the crowd—using their rifles to force back the surging masses. One of them hit a particularly aggressive native under the chin with his rifle, sending the man senseless to the ground!

Then pandemonium broke loose, and it was only after a desperate struggle that Ted managed to reach my side. Together with Hassanein, and shoulder to shoulder, we backed and fought our way to the ditch, which lay in front of the mound on which the ladies were stationed. Springing across this, I brought my gun to the "ready," and ordered Hassanein (whose bronze face had now turned to an ashen grey) to announce that the first man who might venture to cross would sure have his head blown off! Thus Ted and I held the yelling crowds at bay, while Sallie and another of our crew, named Achmet, hustled the now thoroughly terrified women to the entrance of the Sheikh's compound.

As soon as they had gained sanctuary within the sacred precincts, we retreated foot by foot, until we, too, had placed the palisades between ourselves and the surging and yelling mob. The gates were slammed to by the guards, whilst the infuriated populace shook the barriers and flung stones, clods of earth and what, I am sure, was very shocking language in Arabic, at our devoted heads—probably consigning us and all our ancestors to Gehenna.

Then I "went for" the Sheikh, and using our Shikari as interpreter, demanded of him what the devil he meant by telling us to shoot pigeons, when his subjects evidently objected most strongly to the enterprise. And what think you his answer was?

"I am the Sheikh of this village. My people are as dirt under my feet. What I say goes. I ask you here to shoot the pigeons whether my people like it or not. Soon you come again, but next time you bring a troop of cavalry from Cairo; then it will be all right. Allah be praised!"

Imagine the colossal cheek of the man! Figure to yourself (as the French say) our distinguished party arriving at Maidoum escorted by a troop of resplendent Egyptian cavalry in full parade order and armed to the teeth. Fancy this detail of military power surrounding us—modest little wielders of the gun—whilst we proceeded to slaughter the harmless, necessary doves. I trow that the spectacle would be one to cause excruciating hilarity and amusement to any onlooker blessed with a sense of humour; always provided that he himself was not involved in the presentation of the farce. What a stunt for a producer of "slap-stick" comedy.

Well, with the aid of the Sheikh's escort, we were hustled out at the back of his "palace," shook the dust of Maidoum off our feet, and succeeded in reaching the *Cleopatra* without further adventure, but feeling considerably perturbed and ruffled.

I may here state that, some years later, two young British officers, stationed at Cairo, were inveigled into a visit to this inhospitable village, when a disturbance similar to that which we had suffered arose. Alas! in their case the *dénouement* was far more serious than in ours, for *one of them was done to death;* whilst the other was so cruelly maltreated that for a time his life was despaired of!

This tragedy, of course, led to drastic measures by the Cairo Authorities. The then Sheikh (who was, I believe, the son of our old friend), together with fifteen of his liege subjects, were strung up in the desert, where their vile bodies were left for the gastronomic benefit of the vultures, and as a warning to recalcitrant Arabs to pay proper respect to the persons of British subjects!

I have said that the Sheikh who invited us was possessed of colossal impudence. My opinion of him was confirmed when—on the morning following the day of our unpleasant adventure—he put in an appearance at the *Cleopatra*, as calmly as if nothing had happened!

Whilst taking his coffee with us on deck, I perceived that he was casting the glad eye of impertinence at my C.O. Presently he called Hassanein to him, and made a communication; whereupon the latter came over to me with a quizzical grin on his classic countenance.

"What has the Sheikh been saying?" I asked.

The interpreter's smile widened.

"I not like to say, Ba-sha!"

"Go on, man, out with it!"

"He say will Ba-sha sell the *Sit Soya* (the *young* lady). He want her for wife for his son. He say he give blenty money!"

This was a startling offer indeed, but my sense of humour overcame my natural indignation.

"Tell the Sheikh," I said, "that there's nothing doing; but he can have the *Sit Kabera* (the *old* lady) cheap, if he likes!"

Hassanein soon returned.

"Sheikh say he no want *old* lady, but if you not want sell *Sit Soya, can he buy one like her in England?"*

"Oh, is that it?" I said. "Yes, I should imagine that if he went to London he could pick up plenty who would be overjoyed and highly honoured in becoming the wife of the Sheikh junior, sharing with him the glories of Maidoum."

The last words of the amorous Sheikh were:

"I go to England—next boat!"

I left it at that!

Some five miles higher up the Nile we came across a large village built on its banks. Here also were hundreds of "Blue Rocks." After ascertaining that the inhabitants—so far from objecting to our proposed attack on the birds, actually welcomed strangers who were bent on sport—we determined to have another go, and so enjoyed some excellent shooting, as the birds at sunset swooped down to the river to drink. It was here that I noticed a custom of these pigeons which was utterly at variance with my previous experience of their normal habits and customs. They would actually *settle on the water*, after the fashion of duck, and slake their thirst as they drifted peacefully down-stream.

On reaching Luxor we tarried several days, and divided our time between quail-shooting and visiting the ancient temples and tombs for which that delectable oasis is famous.

I shall never forget the impression of grandeur conveyed to me when we visited the Temple of Karnak. The moon was at its full. There, unfolded to our wondering gaze, was a vision of the majestic glories of ancient Egypt such as thrilled my soul with awestruck amazement, and caused me to reflect adversely upon the insignificance of modern culture.

Then we made our way onwards, but we had not proceeded far beyond Girgeh when the expedition was brought to an abrupt close by a direful mishap which overtook me personally. Before that happened, however, we had suffered two days of a desert sand-storm, a most oppressive and unpleasant experience! One day, after the air had cleared, I was angling for Nile fish from the deck of the *Cleopatra*, when suddenly I was seized with the most agonizing pains I have ever suffered. I rushed below and collapsed. The faithful Ted saw that I was in desperate straits. Leaving me in the tender and sympathetic care of my C.O., her mother and Abu Zed, he disembarked, commandeered a camel, cut across the desert to Girgeh, and telegraphed to Doctor Keatinge (the celebrated physician of Cairo) to come up post-haste to my succour. My guardian angels were unremitting in their attention, and—Heaven be praised!—by the time the doctor arrived the worst of the trouble had passed, though I was left in a very weak and shaken condition.

We drifted back to Girgeh in order to take a train for the capital.

Here we ran across an R.A. officer, named Captain Machell, whom I knew, and who had with him no less a personage than Slatin Pasha, who had just escaped from the clutches of the Mahdi at Omdurman; where he had been kept in durance vile for many weary years, sometimes half starved, sometimes in chains for weeks together; at others almost beaten to death, and finally being forced to act as "syce" to run before his oppressor's chariot.

At last, the strenuous efforts made for Slatin's rescue succeeded, with the result as stated—that we hit him off on his journey back to Cairo. He was garbed in an ancient jibbeh, with a faded tarboosh, bereft of tassel, on his head, and lint slippers on his feet—a pitiful figure indeed, as compared with the resplendent Rudolph Slatin, who had been Governor of Darfur before he was captured by the Mahdists. He seemed dazed and almost distraught, but on his arrival at the capital he was received with acclamation and general rejoicings. In course of a surprisingly short space of time he regained his normal condition, and became once more a power in the land.

Eventually he was appointed Sirdar, but when the Great War broke out in 1914, he—being nominally an Austrian subject—decided that it behoved him to resign his position under the British ægis, and to repair to the land of his birth, where, as matters turned out, he proved of inestimable service and benefit to British prisoners of war, and where he acted with never-failing tact and urbanity as mediator between Austria and the Allies.

It is worthy of note that the Mahdi was so enraged at Slatin's escape that he vowed that if ever, or whenever, he could recapture the fugitive, he *would have him scraped to death with oyster shells!*

Truly, a most unpleasing and messy death!

It was on the occasion of my first visit to Cairo that I came in contact with Major Herbert Kitchener and Captain "Paddy" Mahon—the former destined, in time to come, to be known to world-wide fame as Earl Kitchener of Khartoum; the latter, as reliever of Mafeking and a notable army corps commander in the more recent ragings of Bellona.

Kitchener, at the time I write of, was already causing a considerable stir in military and diplomatic circles. He had just returned to Cairo after having, single-handed, penetrated certain disaffected districts in the Upper Nile, camouflaged as a full-blooded native. The information which he had thus gathered proving of the greatest value to the H.Q.S.

There was some talk of my riding a very smart pony of his in "The Cairo Derby," but, much to my disappointment, the animal, a very nippy and game Arab, broke down a few days before the race was to be decided at the Khedivial Club.

It was on the occasion of my previous visit to the land of backsheesh and beetles that, when embarking at Naples on the Orient liner *Oroya* (subsequently wrecked), I found myself a fellow passenger of one Jack Seely, who was regarded by all on board with admiration and awe, by reason of his having recently performed an act of outstanding valour, for which he had received the Albert Medal. This was he who subsequently rose effulgently on the Parliamentary firmament, and became War Minister, and afterwards—in the Great War—a most distinguished major-general.

Hassanein, having failed in persuading us to pitch our tents on the plains of Fayoum during our previous visit to Egypt, now renewed the attack so persistently that, for the sake of peace and quiet, we at last consented to fall in with his views. Accordingly he fitted us out and fixed us up in orthodox Bedouin style remote from the busy life of Cairo. Our sleeping tent was certainly decorative, but not altogether savoury. To put it mildly, it was decidedly stuffy and reeked of native odours.

The first night an owl of the species known as "Little" persisted in serenading me with its feline-like mewings, as it sat on one of the guy-ropes of our kitchen tent. Its far from dulcet notes so got on my nerves, that I made a target of it for my revolver; but my practice was by no means accurate. Its report, however, moved the abhorrent bird for the nonce; but it soon returned, and growing accustomed to the explosion, it refused to budge, but continued its irritating "recital" until the first glimmer of a hopeless dawn warned it that it was time for it to seek repose. Then a chorus of frogs arose, such as would have delighted the soul of Aristophanes, but which left me cold. There must have been hundreds of the sprightly reptiles within a few yards of the tent. They voiced their raucous cacophony so persistently and continuously that, not being able to stand their concerted croakings any longer, I went out in my pyjamas with a view to scattering the disturbers of my slumbers to the four winds of Heaven; but, search as I would, not a single frog could I discover.

The "sport" which our dragoman had promised proved a veritable "dud." There were no snipe, no duck—not even the homely pigeon was in evidence. The only fowl that we set eyes on until we arrived at the shores of the ancient lake were parti-coloured kingfishers and a few egrets or paddy-birds. But when the waters were reached, we could see numerous pelicans floating on the placid surface. In the silvery mist of the morning they appeared about the size of ostriches, and seemed to be quite tame until our boat was within a couple of hundred yards of them; but without appearing in the least bit of a hurry, they managed to keep that distance between our craft and their tail feathers.

I thought to spring a surprise on them with my rook-rifle, but though my leaden missiles fell with a "plomp" in close proximity to the plethoric body of one of the tribe, I failed to hear the satisfying "plunk" which signalizes a palpable hit.

I wondered what fish, if any, inhabited the lake. By way of experiment, I rigged up a spinning flight with a gold "devon," and tried trailing, but all I caught was the submerged carcase of a long deceased goat.

On landing, we became aware that a bunch of natives was busy with a drag-net, so we waited and watched the operations expectantly. Nor were we disappointed, for when the bag was finally hauled ashore, we saw that it encompassed a multitude of fishes. There were great Nile perch, some of which must have weighed half a hundredweight or more; also carp-like creatures, which were evidently closely related to the sportive mahseers of India and Kashmir. Among the smaller fry were catfish, and others to which I could give no name. When I inquired of Hassanein as to their identity, I was met by his usual non-committal assertion that they were "someping," but as to *what* they were, he either could not, or would not, deign to enlighten me. So I gave it up!

When I mildly suggested to him that we were getting but a poor return for our trouble and outlay, he played his trump card: "To-night, berhabs, Ba-shas shoot jackal."

Perhaps?

It was a fine, still night, and the moon was at its full when our shikari posted us near a donga overgrown with short scrub, which was supposed to be the home of the wily "jacks."

A "kill" had been secured—the carcase of a lamb which had yielded to some infantile disorder several days previously, and was now suffering from the first symptoms of disintegration. So much so that when I first set eyes upon it I was in doubt as to whether it was really dead. It seemed so lively!

We had a long wait, but just before sunrise a shot came from Ted's ground machan, followed by a yelp of pain—and then silence!

I saw my cousin rise to his full height and wave his weapon triumphantly.

"Got 'im!" he shouted.

We all ran to the spot which he indicated.

There, calm and serene, in the arms of death, lay—no jackal forsooth—but a mangy "pie-dog," which presumably had wandered from an adjacent village, no doubt attracted by the (to him) appetizing odour of the "kill."

John Leech, of *Punch* fame, delighted to lampoon the early volunteers. I believe that one of his sketches gave rise to the vulgar query addressed by street *gamins* of the day to the valiant amateur warriors: "Who shot the dog?"

For years after our Fayoum adventure, should anyone make a similar inquiry of the doughty Ted, he, if it were a man or boy, was in deadly peril of receiving "a thick ear"; if of the gentler sex, of experiencing the chilling influence of "the lemon eye"!

No! camping at Fayoum was not good enough for your Uncle Cockie or his satellites; so tents were struck, and we drifted back to Cairo, wiser if sadder for our latest experience.

Hassanein's stock experienced a slump!

I must not quit my rambling reminiscences of Egypt without referring once more to Hassanein, *alias* Farag. (By the way, it seems that there really was a Farag, for, on informing our dragoman that my belief in the existence of his "brudder" had been hopelessly shattered, he one day produced a resplendent individual, and introduced him as such. Even so, I had my suspicions that the said individual had been induced to impersonate a nebulous entity by being slipped a sufficiency of shekels.) Strange coincidences are wont at times to materialize. As I was jotting down these vagrant vapourings, a letter was handed me. On opening it I discovered that it was from Hassanein himself, written more than a quarter of a century after we had finally parted at Alexandria. In it, after reminding me of "Auld lang syne," and calling down the blessings of Allah on my head and on those of my offspring, he ventured to remind me of the gold watch and double-barrelled, hammerless, up-to-date breech-loader which I had (not) promised him!

This modest missive drove my thoughts back to an occasion during my first visit to Egypt, when, on Hassanein's pressing invitation, I had paid him a visit in his native mud hut, there to partake of coffee, smoke the calumet of peace, and be introduced to his wife; the latter ceremony marking me as one highly honoured; inasmuch as Mussulman etiquette does not, as a rule, permit of such presentation of a Giaour to the fair partners of the devout.

Mrs. Hassanein (or Farag) duly appeared; but after affording me a fleeting vision of over-ripe charms, she scuttled back to the seclusion of her lord and master's modest seraglio.

When only a year later the draw of Cairo brought me back to its wondrous charms, the irrepressible Hassanein again insisted on my partaking of his humble hospitality "*chez lui*." When, lo and behold! a smirking damsel of some fourteen or fifteen summers (the Arab girls mature very quickly) was proudly produced by my host.

"Your daughter, Hassanein?" I inquired.

"Not daughter, Ba-sha. This my *wife*," he said.

"Indeed! Then I fear that the "*Sit*" whom I saw last year is dead?" I remarked sympathetically.

"Oh, no, Ba-sha. She not dead. I send her away. I not like her! Perhaps I like this better, but not sure. If not, I send her away too, and get other one. Blenty ready!"

Well, well, well!

CHAPTER XXI

THE Pentland Firth is not a friendly piece of water; nay, at times, it is positively and aggressively objectionable, especially to those whose fate it is to suffer the pangs of *mal de mer*. Luckily for myself, I am not one of those unfortunates, though when the stormy sea doth rage and I am on its palpitating bosom I am apt to feel anything but boisterously hilarious. In fact, at all times I hate and abhor the rough stuff served up by Father Neptune. There is only one phase during a sea voyage which "gets my goat" more thoroughly, and that is a glassy surface, swept by a dense fog. This from painful experience; for it was my fate to be a passenger on board the old *Leinster* when, under such conditions, she barged into the lightship *Albatross*—hard by the coast of Ireland—catching her amidships and sending her to Davy Jones's locker inside of seven minutes. The fog was so dense that one could hardly see one's hand in front of one's nose. I had been reclining in my comfortable bunk, reading the latest "seller" of Rider Haggard, and unconcernedly listening to the constant hooting of the siren, when suddenly I was conscious of a shock (by no means a severe one), followed by a strange grinding and creaking. Then came the tinkling of the engine-room bell; at first "Half speed," then "Full speed astern!"

There followed the trampling of many feet on deck. Excursions and alarums and excited shoutings and objurgations assaulted my ears; so I came to the conclusion that it was time I got a move on, for the purpose of personally investigating the reason of this to-do.

When I had ascended the companion-way, a strange sight presented itself; the exact meaning of which was obscured by the fog.

" What's up ? " I asked a phlegmatic sailor man.

" We've run down the blinkin' lightship, guv'nor," he replied. " There she is stuck on our bows like a blinkin' 'errin' on a skewer. Blyme, she'll be down in a couple of shakes, as soon as we backs out of her guts ! "

" Great heavens ! " I exclaimed. " What about her crew ? "

" Oh, they're all right, guv'nor. They've boarded us quick as a bunch of monkeys—seven of 'em ; but seemin'ly they'll lose all their kit and belongin's."

" How did it happen ? "

" Gawd knows, guv'nor. We must be five miles out of our course. I never knowed the like of it afore."

And so it turned out. Down went the *Albatross* as soon as we had backed clear of her, causing a maelstrom, which rocked the old *Leinster* hard and good. Our bows were stove in ; but collision mats, deftly used, enabled us to limp into harbour.

The " Old Man " had been over twenty years in the service, but he was " scrubbed," which seems rather hard lines, having in view the baneful conditions which had brought about the catastrophe.

That is why a fog at sea always " puts the wind up " me !

As for storms, a tough old merchant service skipper once confided to me :

" Long experience has taught me to mistrust the absolute veracity of man, but when one comes to me and says, ' Captain, I hope we shall have a bit of a toss : I simply love rough weather,' then *I know he's a liar !* "

I cordially concurred.

Meet then our party as we landed after a short but by no means sweet passage of the Pentland Firth. With me, my C.O., her brother Marcus, her Aunt Elsie, her head lad (Henry George), my beloved cousin Ted Jaquet, and the inevitable Bedford, with Flora his wife. I had long had my eye on the Orkneys as a suitable field for sporting amenities of a variegated order.

It was my luck to secure a three-months' lease of Graeme's Hall, finely situated on the bay of that name, in the island of Pomona—the largest and most important of the Orkney group. We had a rather cold drive, though it was then the commencement of August; so that on our arrival at our destination the genial light and warmth of the Hall, and its table laden with smoking provender, brought much comfort and joy to our weary souls. I was up betimes in the morning, and with Ted and Marcus (Henry George was elsewhere) made a visiting round. After seeing to the welfare and "messing" of our dogs—Belle, the little old pointer, the truest and staunchest of her breed ever pupped, and my retriever Sweep (afterwards known on the show bench as "Champion Black Cloth"), then only a youngster and half broken, but showing extraordinary promise—we strolled down to a likely-looking mire, which stretched from within three hundred yards of the back door of the Hall right away to the hills, half a mile distant. In the centre of this was a rush-grown tarn, where, much to our satisfaction, we viewed two skeins of mallard circling round before alighting on its surface. I began investigating the mire itself, but had not proceeded a dozen yards before a leash of full snipe flushed and went off with the protestations common to their species. So I retreated discreetly. We returned to breakfast in high hope and spirits.

As it turned out, this mire proved an almost inexhaustible provider of the genus *scollopidæ.* Although the majority of these were young birds, they were exceedingly smart on the wing, and in first-rate condition. Lesser marshes and springs lay throughout the valley, so that the birds, when disturbed from one, would but move on to another; consequently, for nearly a month, we enjoyed snipe-shooting galore. At the end of our stay I had accounted for no less *than* 223 *couple to my own gun!*

This kind of sport, intermingled with the slaughter of sundry other birds—thus affording a mixed bag—has ever appealed to me beyond any form of shooting in which I have indulged.

So you may imagine that I had the time of my life!

There were plenty of duck coming and going, but they were not easily come by, being very wild and wary. However, we exacted a goodly toll of flappers, which, although falling easy prey (even to Henry George, who was no "Sir Garnet" with the gun), and affording but a mild form of sport, were very acceptable as tenants of the larder and, later, served up on the domestic board with orange salad and port wine sauce.

When the reaping had taken place and the corn stood in "stooks," we essayed moonlight raids; for then the duck came to the corn-fields in considerable numbers; but not possessing the faculty for seeing in the dark possessed by owls, bats, cats and other nocturnal marauders, but little execution was done, though plenty of powder and shot was loosed off. On one occasion I feared that murder was in the air; for Henry George, who was a hot-blooded guy, had fallen out with the frolicsome Ted, because the latter had played a practical joke which unwittingly seemed to have cast some aspersion on the former's lady-love; whereupon H. G. had uttered blood-curdling threats, which made me nervous as to the outcome when the twain, both armed with lethal weapons, should be within hail of one another beneath the baleful rays of Diana. The said H. G. was, as stated, an indifferent performer with the gun, but had he been so minded he could hardly have missed so conspicuous a mark as Ted—even in the dark.

Happily the said H. G. refrained from bloodshed, and so avoided inevitable *sus. per coll.* There was a sprinkling of grouse on the moors. On the opening day we gathered nine brace over Belle, and subsequently, enough were accounted for to provide a welcome addition to our *menus*; but as far as I was personally concerned, I considered the game hardly worth the candle, so confined my attention to the snipe, the trout and the sea-fish; leaving the "grousing" to Marcus and Bedford, who thus acted as provision merchants. I presume that they found some sort of amusement in their calling. In all, the tally of grouse was forty-three brace (we were limited to fifty brace), and added to these were a baker's dozen of hares of the genuine red variety, also very acceptable with red-currant jelly and trimmings.

I never *shoot* hares myself on principle. I consider them far too valuable as accessories to harriers and greyhounds.

Meanwhile, as stated, I confined my personal attention to the snipe and duck, and to trout and sea-fish. With the last named the waters of the Orkneys teem; big cod and particularly fine haddocks offering unlimited diversion to those who appreciate such side-shows as varying the monotony of more orthodox sport.

I am one of these. I look upon *no* form of fishing with contempt and " despisery." The greater the variety, the better am I pleased.

One of the most attractive features to draw me to the isles of the far North was the fishing for *salmo trutta* in the voes of the sea, of which sport I had heard wonderful accounts. I was told that all I should have to do would be to await the assembling of the sea-trout in " the season of the year," don my waders and step out from the golden strand until within casting distance of the sienna-tinted, weed-grown rocks, around which the desirable fishes are wont to congregate and play, and where they would, so I was assured, freely partake of such delusive fare as the angler might put before their noses, always provided that the said fare showed " local colour " such as would appeal to their eyes and appetites.

I have no doubt that when conditions happen to be favourable, this sport is all that it is claimed to be; but as evil luck would have it, such conditions were conspicuous by their absence during my sojourn at Graeme's Hall, except on one notable occasion. The fact is that there had been a long drought; consequently the little burns which ran into the bay at various points were almost completely dried up, only a tinkling little trickle of sweet water finding its way to the salt. The voes, therefore, were crystal clear, and though many sea-trout—some of great size—were to be seen disporting themselves therein, there was nothing doing for the angler. An occasional and desultory " short rise " being all that was vouchsafed throughout many days of wearisome casting.

I collected my forces and detailed them to dam up one of these burns, with a view to the creation of an artificial spate. When the psychological moment arrived and the flood was let loose, I was to stand by with my angling outfit, and be ready to open an attack on the fish, which I figured would rush to enjoy the long-waited-for advent of fresh water, and the verminous and entomological provender which would be swept down with it to the emerald sea. The water near the mouth would then show a subdued tint more appropriate to the business which I was bent upon. But our meticulous plans were upset. Down came the impromptu flood so precipitately that its force was exhausted in about forty seconds; though, for that brief space, it was so powerful that any sea-trout venturing within the immature torrent would have been swept far beyond the reach of my longest cast. The affair was literally "a wash-out!"

But at last the long-deferred irrigations of Aquarius materialized; for after a couple of days' downpour, the voe showed a sort of dull pastel green tint instead of its scintillating emerald hue as heretofore; moreover, the fish—in large quantities—were rising and "bulging" freely among the rocks, close in-shore, and at the mouth of the burn. I had been advised to use a hackle fly, known as the "flamingo"—of a brilliant scarlet; or, alternatively, a double hook affair *à la* Stewart tackle, having a prairie-hen wing and a silver body. I suppose the latter was intended as a counterfeit presentment of the ever-attractive sand eel.

The first two fish that came my way were herling, which were safely creeled. Then something big attached itself and went out to sea like a torpedo, making my reel screech loudly. All of a sudden, down came the point of my rod, and snap—swish! It was smashed to smithereens—an over-wind! the result of reprehensible carelessness in not seeing that all was taut before commencing operations. I had to wade back to shore, and then found that I had not a spare cast with me; so there was nothing for it but to leg it back in my waders to the Hall. This meant loss of valuable time. The half ebb was already a thing of the past, and soon hope would be at a discount; for the chances of good sport are limited to a couple of hours when the tide is just right.

At last I was at work again, and after having pulled out another herling by the scruff of its neck, I struck something which gave me an extraordinary feel. A sort of passive resistance—not in the least like the active antagonism of a big sea-trout—but there was weight behind this customer. When I had him close in, and on the surface, my curious gaze fell upon a great, gaping mouth and big lack-lustre eyes. A *five-pound codling* by all that was wonderful—a strange catch to come one's way when trout fishing!

I was not over-pleased with this unlooked-for intrusion, as it meant more waste of time, and as yet I had not had a decent fish, though they were to be seen busy all over the place; but after a few more casts, I saw a beauty come at me, and he took a firm hold. Then I had ten minutes' excellent sport and excitement before I netted, with complete satisfaction, a beautiful silvery specimen of the *trutta* ilk, which when weighed went to exactly six and a half pounds.

This proved the first and last really decent fish which I caught in the voes. I had one of two pounds soon after; and then there was a tremendous commotion. It appeared as if the whole bunch had been scared by some danger beyond my ken; for they proceeded to rush out to the depths ot the sea with panicky precipitancy, leaving me with nothing to angle for.

Nor did they return the next day, or ever again during my stay.

The ways of fishes are indeed passing strange!

And now I must go back a bit in order to introduce you to a very notable personage, none other than Doctor Straton, Bishop of Sodor and Man, who, like myself, had heard of the excellent fishing in the voes of the sea for *salmo trutta*. His lordship wrote asking me, that if, during his Episcopal holiday, he happened to visit the Orkneys, would I grant him the great privilege of fishing from the shores of Graeme's Hall Bay. As I had heard of the sporting proclivities of this eminent divine, and being primed with the spirit of angling fraternity, I there and then sat down and wrote to the good Bishop, saying that I hoped he would make himself free of Graeme's Hall and so afford us the pleasure of his company, as soon as he was able to tear himself from his see.

In due course his Lordship arrived and overwhelmed me with words of gratitude and thankfulness; but alas! he put in an appearance when conditions—as before described—were at their very worst for the sport on which he had set his heart. Day after day we fished together, with a cloudless sky overhead; casting our flies unproductively on the translucent waters. At last we became thoroughly fed-up. I was in despair of showing my guest sport with the fishes. So I drew a bow at a venture.

"Do you ever indulge in shooting, Doctor?" I asked.

"Why, yes," he said. "In my early days before I took Orders, I was much addicted to the gun."

"Well, then," quoth I, "if you would like to renew acquaintance with that weapon, I can take you to the marshes and show you snipe galore, with a duck or two thrown in."

"My dear Cox," he replied sententiously, "fishing is one thing, but shooting quite another. What would my flock say if they heard that their spiritual mentor was indulging in the latter recreation?"

"It is a long, long trail from the Isle of Man to the Orkneys," I ventured.

"Well, well," said his Lordship, "perhaps under the circumstances I *might* indulge."

"Good!" I exclaimed. "I can fix you up with a gun and ammunition."

"Oh, thank you very much. I have brought a pair of Purdies with me."

"Oh! That's capital," I said. "Come along then!"

Half an hour later found us approaching the edge of the productive marsh, with the old pointer Belle as keen as mustard for the fray, and my clever, but "half-baked" retriever Sweep, at my heels. No sooner was the old bitch's foot upon the rushy surface than she froze out in a dead point!

"Go on, Doctor," I whispered, "the birds are sure there!"

My guest hurried up; when a wisp of five longbills rose, uttering their well-known lamentations. The Bishop was as quick as lightning on the first bird, which he "floored" in masterful style; then, slewing round, he brought down a spectacular long-shot with his second—both birds as dead as stones!

"You don't seem to have forgotten the art," I said admiringly.

"Well, well, it's not so bad considering my want of practice."

Somehow I doubted that want of practice. Ere we had gone far, my suspicions grew stronger than ever, for Doctor Straton seemed to shoot as one to the manner born.

Just as we approached the small tarn which lay in the centre of the marsh, a couple of teal gave me a remote chance, and as luck would have it, I peppered one of them severely; but it was going at a terrific speed and vol-planèd down on a long swoop. Before I could stop him, Sweep was dashing over the marsh, bent on retrieving the teal—now some five hundred yards distant. In his mad career he put up clouds of snipe, which went screaming and gyrating all over the place.

My companion stood aghast. Laying his gun on the ground, he exclaimed frigidly:

"Look here, Cox, I tell you what it is: that damned dog of yours has spoilt our whole day's sport—Confound him!"

It was my turn to be aghast. To hear such language from the sacred lips caused me unutterable pain.

Moreover, I felt deeply ashamed of my awful hound.

But matters were not as bad as the irate divine imagined, for the snipe, after wheeling wildly in the air, dropped down into another marsh about a quarter of a mile distant, and Master Sweep, having received well-deserved correction, was now attached to a lead; so that the wrath of my guest was duly appeased, and we proceeded on our way to take heavy toll of the birds.

A few days previously, I contrived a rather curious shot. A couple of snipe rising, one on my right and the other on my left, at about thirty paces, had crossed one another just as I pulled off, with the result that both lay within a foot of one another as dead as a door-nail!

When Doctor Straton and I arrived on the scene of this exploit, I was narrating to him this curious incident. Hardly had I finished speaking, when again a couple rose, remote from one another, on my right and left respectively. These also crossed in their flight, and, as on the previous occasion, *both* *fell to my one barrel,* within a few yards of where their fellow-victims had given up the ghost on the previous occasion.

Truly coincidence has a very long arm!

Did I hear you say: "Yes, and *shooters* draw a *very long bow?*" But what I am telling you is gospel. What is more, it forms a decidedly striking parallel with the story of the two salmon caught at the same spot in the Furnace Lake at Burrishoole, as narrated in a former chapter.

CHAPTER XXII

UNDOUBTEDLY Sweep's backsliding caused him to be held in contempt by His Sporting Lordship. It must be remembered, however, that my cherished retriever was but a puppy, and consequently somewhat irresponsible; but this was the natural outcome of intense keenness. He had all the makings of an A1 dog, and, in course of time, was so pronounced by every sportsman that shot over him.

Some days before Dr. Straton arrived at Graeme's Hall, Ted and I had made a raid on a late clutch of flappers which had been bred in the nearer tarn. Among this bunch of nine was a callow and backward "Little Willie," which, being unable to take wing with his brothers and sisters, escaped lethal powder and shot, but had to put up with persistent persecution on the part of Sweep.

Every morning, my black beauty would slip off, whilst we were negotiating breakfast, and chivvy the unfortunate *caneton* until the latter was so exhausted that it allowed the dog to take it tenderly (Sweep had a velvet mouth) in his jaws and transport it, in triumph, to our presence.

This diurnal formality being completed, the flapper was each day returned to its native haunts, there to await a further call by the enemy. I had a hunch to pull the episcopal nether limb—gaiters and all!

"You don't think much of Sweep, do you, Doctor?" I asked.

"Well, well. I cannot say that I do; but perhaps if you do not spare the rod, you may avoid spoiling the pup!"

"Believe me," I replied, "Sweep is super-intelligent. He knows every word I say to him. A nod is as good as a wink to make him carry out orders. Now if I were to ask him to slip off to the tarn yonder and bring me back a duck, do you suppose he could or would succeed in so doing?"

"I am not given to rash speculation. I simply abhor the vice of gambling, but I dare venture my clerical headgear against your lay tile, that he neither could nor would do anything of the sort."

"Done!"

I went to the door and whistled for my favourite. "Sweep," I said in my ordinary tone of voice, "His Lordship wants you to fetch him a wild duck from over there" (inclining my head in the direction of the rush-grown mere). "Do you think you could find one?"

This was enough! Sweep was off like a shot. In less than a quarter of an hour he was back again with the much-harassed duckling, firmly but tenderly held in his jaws!

"Well I'm——" (here the Bishop, no doubt mindful of his former lapse, pulled up short)—"I'm—I'm—*blessed!*"

In the evenings, after our day's sport and a grateful repast, during which His Lordship showed his unstinted appreciation of Pol Roger 1889 (then in its prime), my C.O. "would oblige" on her violin. She was a thorough musician and knew how to extract the sweetest music from that glorious (when gloriously played) instrument. The dulcet strains invariably caused our guest to slip gently into the arms of Morpheus, whilst not infrequently he would join in with a nasal obbligato which was somewhat trying to those blessed with a sensitive ear for music.

Again I ventured on a little mild leg-pulling. This time the plot was carried out by conspiracy.

We all waited until the Bishop was fast asleep and emitting a cacophony like unto the grinding and whirring of a twenty-horse-power steam saw mill.

Then the C.O. drew her bow across the strings in one long-sustained, excruciating discord!

Dr. Straton opened his eyes, rubbed them, and bowed to the player.

"Thank you *so* much," he murmured suavely. "That was really divine! My favourite melody. Every note went to my heart, calling up visions of my childhood's days, when my dear mother used to play it on her harp. Again, thank you! *thank* you!"

After His Lordship had departed in peace, I took to sea-fishing, a sport to which, *faute de mieux*, I was much addicted.

So I chartered a twelve-tonner manned by a North Briton (the inhabitants of the Orkneys are apt to take deep offence if rated as Scots) of the name of Gunn, who, when not engaged in maritime amenities, earned a hard but honest living by renovating the footgear of the inhabitants of Pomona.

Ted had, by this time, made himself scarce, and so had Marcus, brother of my C.O.; so that Henry George was the only one of my own sex and condition that remained to bear me company. I am afraid that the last-named did not appreciate the job, for "when the stormy winds did blow," he "generally went below," to find such seclusion as the "cabin" might grant. In propitious weather, when the surface of the sea was calm and serene, he would hold out gallantly, until we came to our moorings for cod or haddock fishing; then, when I began impaling the useful but repulsive looking lug-worms, his soul would sicken again, and the angling proceedings would interest him no more.

This cod-fishing, if not highly exciting, had its thrills; for whilst the tide was running at half ebb or flow, and always providing that we had taken our bearings correctly, we (Gunn and I) were kept busy. The first time I let my line down with its length of steel trace, I thought I had fouled a rock, and so began to curse my luck; but, having put on a vigorous strain, I felt the obstruction lift a few feet.

"That's a fish ye have, sir-r," called out the skipper. "Wind up quick!"

All very well to say "Wind up quick," when I could only lift the creature a foot or two at a time, with twenty fathoms of line to reel in, and the top of my stout sea-rod bent right below the surface of the water. My hands and wrists became numbed by the strain; but at last, gazing down into the clear depths, I could see gyrating vigorously a silver body, which appeared to be about the size of a normal whiting.

As the roll of line thickened on the winch-pin, the flashing form assumed larger dimensions, until at last it came floundering to the surface, there to be skilfully gaffed by my sailor-cobbler. *A cod of eighteen pounds.*

This sort of thing went on pleasantly, if monotonously. No sooner was the bait down than it was seized by one of the goggle-eyed, gaping-mouthed monsters, until the whole of the deck was covered with their corpses—the biggest twenty-two and a half pounds, the smallest eleven pounds. But as soon as the tide slackened the fish went dead off the feed.

Then we came in nearer the mouth of the bay, where the currents still ran strongly, and set ourselves to the capture of the common haddock of commerce. These were very fine specimens, and whilst on the take, could be hauled up two at a time, as long as conditions favoured.

Naturally I began to wonder what we should do with such a miraculous draught of fishes; so asked Gunn how much they would fetch in the Kirkwall fish-market, and was told that the whole caboodle (there was quite *a quarter of a ton* of good fish-food) would command *about two shillings—spot cash!*"

What about crimped cod at two-and-six per pound in Bond Street?

We ate of them (with oyster sauce) at Graeme's Hall until the very name of cod or haddock caused a certain nausea to overcome us. Some we salted, and the rest we gave away to anyone who would deign to take them off our hands.

At times we did a bit of whiffing for mackerel, and one day, after many abortive attempts, I got among a shoal of very fine fish, with my fly rod. When, using the flamingo and silver eel fly, as recommended for the sea-trout, I had some excellent fun. I took nearly a score of the gorgeously bedizened fish, each one of which, on my light tackle, put up a real good fight.

But mackerel we could *not* give away. The hardy Norsemen (most of the dwellers in the Orkneys are of Scandinavian descent) simply would not look at them, much less taste of their flesh. They declared that, when one of their ilk had the misfortune to meet a watery end, these decorative fish would tear the poor corpse to shreds, leaving nothing but bones to find a final sanctuary in Davy Jones's locker. A fact which, in their simple opinion, renders mackerel "unclean," and unfit for human consumption. For my own part I never dwell upon what my dead rations may have subsisted on during their brief span of life on this beautiful but desperately cruel sphere. Otherwise, what about ducks, pigs and such-like gross feeders, whose succulent flavour is in *inverse ratio* to the obscenity and repulsiveness of their sustenance ?

John Gunn (sounds more like Notts than the Orkneys, doesn't it ?) came to me one day to ask if I would like to visit the caves on the coast, outside the bay, there to launch an offensive against the Blue Rock pigeons which inhabit them in considerable numbers. Knowing that these birds are able to test the skill of the shooter to the utmost, I thought I would like a try out. It was impossible to use the *Valhalla* (as our half-decked sailing craft was called), by reason of the dangerous, rock-bound coast, which would admit of approach by an ordinary fishing boat only.

Announcing my intention to the C.O., she expressed a wish to accompany the expedition. I was rather surprised at this ; for, although she was a pretty good sailor on a cross-channel steamer or an ocean-going vessel, she had ever expressed an opinion that a voyage in a small boat on the open sea would find her prostrate with *mal de mer*. For that reason she had never yet joined in our various fishing excursions.

Choosing a likely day when the waters appeared calm and pacific and the skies showed no signs of dirty weather in the offing, she, I, Henry George, and the faithful John set forth on this novel venture. All went well during the outgoing voyage. We rounded the point of the bay and coasted along the shores of the open sea until the first of the pigeon-caves was reached. It was a deep embrasure in the lofty cliffs which towered over the waters. Here the water was crystal clear. Gazing down into the depths, a perfect maritime fairyland was revealed. Sea fauna, in the shape of massed formations of many-coloured weeds, swayed in a gentle tide. Here and there, patches of glittering sand were to be seen, whilst, darting hither and thither, shoals of small fish of various species worked their way in and out of the rocks and gently waving weeds.

All of a sudden, a sharp exclamation from the C.O. caused me to raise my eyes from the contemplation of the decorative glories of this submarine paradise. There, not twelve feet from the boat, a large, round and dark head was thrust above the surface, with great, lustrous eyes fixed upon us in obvious curiosity and amazement. It was one of the large marble seals which affect these parts. Having satisfied itself that our intentions were amiable and pacific, it sank slowly beneath the waters, and was lost to sight.

Now our boatman seized a good-sized rock from the heap which he had collected in the bows of the boat, and heaved it into the recesses of the cave, where its violent impact caused a hundred echoes to reverberate in the rocky depths. Scarcely was my gun at the ready when a flock of the "rocks" burst from the aperture at terrific speed. The boat was swaying violently, thus rendering chances very difficult. I let off both barrels wildly, so was hardly surprised when the birds went on their way intact. Another missile brought two belated pigeons to open air. One of these I dropped in first-rate style.

Having exhausted that particular cave we proceeded further on our quest. The shooting was exceedingly difficult; so that I only succeeded in accounting for an average of about one bird to every three shots fired.

Gunn had told me that the best cave of all was still further ahead; so, being by now well-primed with the excitement of the chase, I bade him lay to; but he suggested that the turn of the tide was at hand, and that we might have some difficulty in bringing up to the bay again. Moreover, he pointed to the south-west, where an ominous bank of dark clouds was massing. So I decided to abandon the sport for the nonce.

We had not gone far on the homeward journey, when I devoutly wished that honest John had imparted his warning sooner and more emphatically, for we were making poor way against the tide, which was increasing in power and rapidity every moment. I could see, from the boatman's countenance, that he was becoming seriously alarmed, and that his exertions were beginning to tell on him; so I ordered him to ship sculls, so that Henry George and I could take a turn at the sweeps, which luckily we had brought with us. The wind was now rising and the water becoming decidedly choppy. Soon small wavelets broke over the bows and damped us all. Then, to our horror, we found that, instead of making the point, *we were being carried rapidly out to sea.* The only thing to be done was to turn inshore and skirt the jagged rocks, thus risking a lesser disaster. Henry George, who was not altogether in a well-trained condition, resigned his sweep to Gunn, and then we took alternate turns. I was so intent on what threatened to be a disastrous tragedy that I had not noticed the condition of my C.O. She was evidently in parlous state, blue with the cold, wet to the skin, and shivering in every limb. But I had perforce to stick to my sweep, and so could not go to her succour ; neither could Henry George, who was at the tiller and in almost as bad a state as she was.

The waves began to break over the bows of the little boat, and it was only by keeping her nose well up to them that we avoided being swamped. As it was, we shipped so much water that the planks were afloat ; so Henry George was detailed for persistent baling.

All of a sudden my C.O. collapsed, and subsided in the wash. I shouted to Henry George to raise her head sufficiently to save her from the risk of drowning.

As luck would have it, the wind suddenly dropped, and I could see that by rowing out to sea again and taking a long slant, we might gain the longed-for point.

It was a desperate chance, but it had to be taken.

Never before, and only once since, have I experienced such heartfelt joy and relief as when these tactics proved successful ; *though only by the narrowest of squeaks.* Had it been otherwise our doom had been sealed.

There was yet a long row before us, but no imminent danger. Our spirits rose, and in order to give vent to our feelings, we chortled various seafaring songs as we lay to our sweeps with a will.

But even so, we were unable yet to relieve the C.O., who appeared to have lost consciousness.

When, at long last, our boat grounded on the friendly shores of Graeme's Hall Bay, Henry George ran hot-foot for help. He soon returned from the mansion with Bedford and his wife, Flora, bearing between them hot drinks and blankets.

The poor sufferer was wrapped in the latter; carried between us to Graeme's Hall, and placed in the charge of her aunt. After a hot bath and a good night's rest she came down to breakfast next morning as fresh as a daisy. Glory be! But, believe me, nothing in this world would induce her to set foot in an open sea boat again.

Dogs have strange ways. I verily believe that they possess some intuition of danger besetting those they love. Bedford told me that, during our absence on this unlucky expedition, Sweep had been obviously uneasy and distressed, and that about the time when danger was most imminent to us, he had raised his head and given voice to dismal howls of pent-up misery.

A propos this same Sweep. I forgot to recount a little story which illustrates the reasoning powers of the canine race in general, and of this member of the tribe in particular.

One day, when shooting on a marsh which lay remote from the Hall, a single snipe rose, rather wild, affording me a very long shot. I dropped it with a broken wing; whereupon a mallard sprang from a bunch of reeds which fringed an adjacent pool. This bird also was brought down in similar plight, and fell with a resounding splash in the middle of the water. Sweep immediately went to retrieve it, and succeeded in doing so; but only after an exciting chase; for the duck kept diving, and each time it did so, the dog had to wait until its head popped up again before he could get on terms. It was not until the bird was able to hold breath under water no longer, that my retriever's jaws closed upon it.

As he was bringing it to hand, his eyes fell on the winged snipe, which kept springing from the ground in futile efforts at flight. Releasing the mallard, Sweep traversed the hundred yards or so which lay between the two, and laid hold of the long-bill.

But the duck, as soon as it was released, began to flop back towards the rushes, so the retriever had to drop the snipe in order to arrest the other bird's progress. Then this farce was repeated thrice over. Each time the two birds were brought in closer proximity to one another.

At last he had them practically together. I wondered what he would do next, for I had purposely avoided lending a hand. The dog being now fairly baked, *took the snipe in his mouth,* and *placed one ponderous paw upon the neck of the* unfortunate *canard;* thus pinning it to the ground. Having done so he looked back at me with pleading eyes, as who should say:

" Now then, master, I have done my best. I can do no more; for goodness' sake come and relieve me of these blighters!"

It is said that we are all mad—that the sanest and cleverest of us have a bee in the bonnet, which at times will buzz consumedly.

I suppose that I am not entirely immune from this infliction; but I hold that, like Hamlet, I am " mad but nor'-nor'-west," for assuredly " when the wind is southerly I know a hawk from a herne!" Only once have I been accused of being a stark, staring lunatic, and that by my old freind Henry George.

It happened this way:

One fine day I took him over from Pomona to the neighbouring island of Burry, where, so I had been informed, golden plover—which are succulent and desirable birds—were wont to congregate. With us came the hoo-doo terrier, Billy—of infamous notoriety—for the reason that (supposing the golden birds were not to be found) there was a large colony of rabbits which inhabited the sand-dunes, and these I proposed to " pink " with my rook-rifle, using the said Billy for the purpose of digging out any of the coneys which, after being imperfectly shot, might drag themselves into their sandy burrows.

Soon after landing, I found that the information which I had received about the plover was accurate, for several good flocks were to be seen on the move.

The higher plateau of the island was of considerable extent. Having descried a bunch of about fifty plover in the middle thereof, I began to put in force tactics which, from experience, I had found to be most effective.

Henry George was some five hundred yards remote from me when I commenced operations. I made violent signs to him to circle round, and walk in the opposite direction to myself, thus forming a moving circumference, of which the birds were the centre.

Wrongly imagining that I had put my friend wise to the game, I went on my way at a round pace. On completing each circle I proceeded to describe a smaller one, every time approaching nearer and nearer to the golden beauties..

Everything was going O.K., when suddenly I discovered that Henry George had disappeared as if the ground had opened and swallowed him up. However, I was much too busy at the moment to investigate the mystery, for I was speedily drawing within range of the plover, which were standing stock still, with their necks stretched well forward, gazing in mute astonishment at my evolutions.

When the psychological moment arrived I ran in, and as the birds rose in a cloud, I enfiladed them with such effect that I was able to pick up nine of their number, and reloading quickly, bowled over another brace as the main body of the flock swung back over their fallen comrades to see what had befallen them.

After gathering the slain, I went in search of my missing pal. There was no response to my holloas; but at last I found him, pale and trembling, crouching behind a rock by the sea-shore. When I greeted him, and asked him what was up, I noticed that he addressed me in a very soothing and conciliatory tone of voice (such as one would adopt in addressing a fractious little child), begging me to enter the boat. He said that he wanted exercise, and would row me back to Pomona. When I offered to take an oar, he sternly demurred, and I noticed that he kept his gun close by his side. Just as we were shoving off, we found that Billy, who had been busy with the rabbits on his own, was not to be seen anywhere. Calls and whistles were for a long time unavailing; but at last I tracked him to a rabbit burrow, and hearing him at work within, I lay down, inserted my arm, seized him by his stump of a tail, and dragged him out by main force.

During the row home Henry George seemed to be in a devil of a hurry, but never a word did he speak to me. As soon as we had landed in Graeme's Hall Bay, he took to his heels, and ran as fast as his legs would carry him to the Hall, where, so I was afterwards told, he burst in upon the assembled company, exclaiming fearfully:

"Come down to the beach quickly; *Cockie has gone stark, staring mad!*"

Naturally, this put the wind up my other friends, who post haste sallied forth in a body, followed by Bedford carrying a hank of rope; as Henry George had suggested that my malady might be of so violent a nature that I should require restraint.

I think it was a terrible disappointment to all when they met me half-way, strolling unconcernedly towards them, carrying my well-filled game bag over my shoulder.

"What's the trouble?" I asked, when they came up.

"Trouble!" said my C.O. "Trouble enough! Henry George here told us that you had gone balmy!"

I turned upon the informer.

"What on earth do you mean?" I asked angrily.

"Now, keep calm, Cockie," he soothingly said. "Don't excite yourself; you'll be all right to-morrow. I knew that there was something wrong when I saw you floundering round and round like a mad dog."

Then the reason of his strange conduct suddenly dawned upon me. He had mistaken my instructive gesticulations for signs of maniacal fury, and when he saw me tripping around those birds, the lid was on it with a vengeance.

Even to this day I am sure that he has his doubts as to my sanity on the occasion in question.

For many years past I had made a practice of collecting birds for stuffing which had fallen to my own gun. An expensive and a not altogether satisfactory hobby.

The Orkneys are justly celebrated for their showing of rare varieties. I had been told that even the Great Northern Diver was to be found in the locality, so I determined to see if I could procure one of these gorgeous birds. Therefore, with Gunn and Henry George I set sail, one day, in the *Valhalla*.

There was certainly an immense number of wild fowl to be seen, as we sped on our way between the islands and out into the open sea. Eider-duck, little auk, and the common sea-birds such as razor-bills, puffins, gannets, guillemots, great black-backed gulls, and the lesser ones of the same ilk were in abundance. I also spotted a great skua, and watched with interest, and some disgust, its nasty habit of chivvying the gulls after they had finished their meal, and by constant bullying, causing them to disgorge the half-digested fishes which they had caught, and gobbling them up.

At last Gunn called out that a bunch of divers were in sight. He declared that they were of the "great northern" variety; but as soon as I was near enough, I found that he was wrong and that they were of their smaller, but hardly less beautiful, cousins of the black throated ilk.

They appeared to be tame enough; so when within thirty yards of them, I let fly at the male bird, which was leading the others—probably the female and a clutch of young ones. My shot did not appear to have much effect, which did not altogether surprise me, for I knew how well these birds are protected by their dense plumage, which is apt to deflect the shot. To be effective this must be placed in a vital spot. Then a curious thing happened. Whilst the rest of the birds dived and disappeared, the one which I had fired at, turned round and swam flapping, straight for the boat—uttering plaintive cries. On reaching it the poor creature tried to scramble up over the gunwale, as if—being hurt and sorely terrified—it was trying to induce us to come to its aid and afford it sanctuary. Gunn lifted it out in the landing-net. At first I could find no sign of a shot wound, and I was therefore in hopes that we could take the bird alive as a valuable addition to the Zoological Gardens, of which I was a Fellow; but on closer inspection I saw that a ruby-like bead of blood was welling up at the back of the poor thing's head; so, after leaving it to rest for a few minutes, I gently returned it to the water; but as the boat sped on, it again tried to follow, though so slowly that it gradually fell astern. At last it passed out of sight.

Somehow or other, this incident greatly distressed me. I bitterly regretted having shot at it, and if only I could have felt sure that the beautiful bird had recovered and joined its family, my guilty conscience might have been relieved!

Spero sed vereor!

CHAPTER XXIII

THE year following our Orkney adventure I again went North, but this time took up my abode on the Scottish side of the Pentland Firth—namely, at Ribigill, situated on the Kyles of Tongue, in Sutherlandshire. In addition to the party which was with me on the isles were Bizzy Robinson and Kate, his wife, as well as my two elder sons, Raymond and Denis, who were then aged respectively ten and seven years.

I had been attracted to this pitch by the prospect of mixed sport, which included grouse, black game, duck and roe-deer, together with brown trout in various lochs, an occasional salmon in one of them, and sea-trout and sea-fishing in the Kyles.

Later on, we were again favoured with the company of his Lordship of Sodor and Man.

This breezy spot took some getting at. The postal address was " By " Lairg. I do not know what is meant by the word " By," but, as a matter of fact, we had a lugubrious ride of forty miles from Lairg station—in the usual ramshackle " ma-chine "—before reaching the haven of rest. Our quarters were more primitive than some which I have enjoyed in other sporting localities, but we managed to rub along in fair comfort.

I was particularly keen on entering my eldest hopeful to the sport of shooting. By way of affording him practice, I had brought along with me a clay pigeon trap, and after a bit, he began to break a fair percentage of the discs, so that when the long-looked-for 12th of August arrived, I figured that he would be able to ground a grouse or two, given a fair chance ; and, indeed, so it turned out. Although he was quivering with excitement the first time he approached old Duke's steady point, he accomplished a very smart right and left with his double-barrelled "28" bore. Of course, he was highly delighted, and I think that my parental pride soared sky-high. I forgot to mention that my C.O.'s brother Marcus, with whom you have made acquaintance in the Orkneys and elsewhere, was of the party. The grouse shooting over dogs was decidedly good. Our limit was 250 brace, and although we did not come anywhere near to accomplishing the full tally, we kept up a very fair average for the first two or three weeks. Our best, if I remember rightly, being thirty-two brace to four guns.

There was a good show of black-cock, but these, of course, were not available until later on. In between whiles I fished several small lochs in the neighbourhood, and creeled many brown trout, averaging about three to the two pounds.

In Loch Shinn, one day, I moved a salmon, which rose to my fly several times, but I never touched him. This was the only one of his species that showed during my visit.

The scenery in this district was magnificent. There were several large woods on the hills, in which roedeer were to be found. So when the grouse began to pack, and refused any longer to lie to the dogs, we determined to have a go at the pretty little deer. A buck and three does had been harboured by our keeper, Jamie McDonald. So one day found us posted around the dell, whilst the beaters were pushing through the covert. After a space of time I heard a crashing of undergrowth below me, and presently a dinky little buck broke out within about thirty yards of me. I was using ordinary cartridges in my gun, loaded with Number 4 shot. I let the pretty little fellow have both barrels; but though he stumbled, he picked himself up and made off. He was presumably hard-hit, for it was impossible that I could have missed him altogether. Sweep was at my heels, and as the buck broke loose, he appeared to be utterly flabbergasted at the vision, though quivering with excitement.

In an evil moment I set him off on the trail of the retreating roe, and away he went at his best speed. I followed as best I could, but my progress in the thick growth of the wood was decidedly slow. It was not until I had penetrated nearly a quarter of a mile of the covert that I came suddenly upon an open glade.

Here a most distressing sight met my eyes. Sweep had overtaken the unfortunate buck, bowled it over, and was now worrying it ferociously, whilst the poor creature was struggling to free itself and uttering piteous cries. I called the dog off. Then came the question of how I should give the unhappy victim the *coup de grâce*, and so put it out of its misery. I had not a knife with me, and even so, had I had one, I should sure have sickened at the use of it. Happily McDonald, who had followed me up, now appeared. I turned away while he performed the act of mercy.

From that day forth I swore that no roedeer should suffer from my attack *with a shot gun.* I bitterly regretted that I had not brought my rifle, and so given the little fellow a sporting chance. But the deed was done, and that's all there is to it.

Never have I taken a sporting lease but what some untoward accident or occurrence has cropped up, and Ribigill proved no exception to the rule.

One day we were grouse-shooting over some undulating ground, where it was difficult for a gun to keep in touch with his next-door neighbour, when Marcus went to the point of Ranger—one of our setters—who had pulled up to stiffen over the summit of a heather-grown hillock. Just as the birds rose, McDonald came over the brow, and Marcus, pulling off, gave him a severe peppering. In fact, so bad did the casualty appear (though at the time the ghillie made light of it), that I feared dangerous complications. We plied McDonald freely with whisky, after which he was able to walk back to Ribigill with only slight assistance. He had to keep to his bed for about a week, and then appeared to be quite all right. Marcus, who was fearfully upset by the accident, though it had happened through no fault of his own—but was obviously brought about by reason of the man being quite out of his proper position—presented him with twenty-five pounds and paid the fee of the doctor who had been called in. Nothing more was heard of the affair until some time after we had left Scotland; then much to the surprise and disgust of Marcus, he received a letter from McDonald, hinting that he (Marcus) had *purposely* shot him, and demanding fifty pounds as a solatium. I told my young friend to take no notice of such an outrageous demand; especially as he had been charged with what amounted to an *attempt at wilful murder.* After a time a second letter arrived from McDonald, threatening legal proceedings. Marcus wanted to place the matter in the hands of his solicitors, but again I urged him to "lie doggo." My advice proved sound, for this was the last we heard of the rascal's abominable attempt at blackmail.

It was now that Dr. Straton reappeared on the scene, not this time for the purpose of fishing in the Kyles for sea-trout, or in the lochs for brown; but because he wanted to whisk me off to a wonderful piece of water which he had heard of, called Loch Dianard, which lay some fifteen miles distant, in the heart of the mountains. The stories he had to tell about this loch revealed it as a perfect angler's paradise; so I readily consented to fit out an expedition thereto. It was impossible to carry out our programme in one day, but the Bishop had some kind friends, whose house was situated at the foot of the hill overlooking the wonderful loch, and they had told him that they would be delighted to put us up for the night.

The idea was that we should start early the next morning, and taking a couple of ponies laden with our impedimenta, make our way over the hills, and spend the second night in a shepherd's hut which was said to stand near the banks of the water. We were very hospitably received and entertained by his lordship's friends, and after a good night's rest we began our strenuous climb, accompanied only by my valet Bedford, who was detailed to look after the ponies and our goods and chattels. We had an ascent of nearly three thousand feet over very rough going before we reached the ridge. Then, looking down, we could see, shimmering below, the object of our expedition, a kite-shaped piece of water, the tail of which was formed by what, at a distance, looked like a streak of silver ribbon, but on closer investigation proved to be a stream about fifteen feet wide.

When we arrived at what were to be our quarters for that night, we found a ramshackle affair—a single room, without furniture of any kind, the ceiling of which had no practical existence.

It was already too late to attempt an attack on the fish; moreover, Dr. Straton was pretty well baked by his climb; so he suggested that we should turn in at once and get what sleep we could. We collected armfuls of bracken and made up an impromptu couch. This would have been pleasant and cosy enough had it not been for an army of black midges, which descended upon us with awful rapacity; so that we had to wrap towels around our faces at the imminent risk of being suffocated. We were up betimes in the morning, and then, to our disgust, we saw that the whole valley was wrapped in a dank, white mist. The loch was no longer in view, and we could hardly see our hands before us. So all we could do was to sit on our now thoroughly damp couches and smoke our pipes in sullen silence. This penance for our folly in risking the show, lasted until mid-day. Then the sun came out and gradually dispelled the mist; but there was not a breath of air; consequently the surface of the water was as a sheet of glass.

There was as much chance of our catching a fish of any size or sort as if we had cast our flies in the fountains of Trafalgar Square. Personally, I would not make the attempt; but the enthusiastic Bishop, nothing daunted, went and thrashed the water for all he was worth, until his muscular strength gave out, and he sank exhausted on the friendly heather. But when the shades of evening fell athwart the glen, and the gloaming gave promise of a sporting chance, I wended my way to the river and succeeded in pulling out two and a half brace of very nice sea-trout. Then something of far greater *avoirdupois* got hold of me. Immediately I sensed a *salmon*. But I was fishing with my light trout-rod, and an ordinary single gut cast, with a small sized "fiery brown." So I did not feel altogether happy, and had little hope of success in accounting for this customer. However, it seemed to be an amiable and lethargic sort of fish, for it kept very deep and attempted no rush; but all I could do was to march sedately along the bank, whilst it wended its way calmly and steadily. After a bit the salmon thought it would vary the monotony by turning back and taking me over the ground which I had already covered; and so he kept me marching up and down like a soldier on sentry go. It was not long before I became thoroughly fed up with this profitless parade, so making up my mind to lose—or win—all, I resorted to violent measures, so gave the sullen joker three or four vicious jerks. Then it seemed to awaken to the serious nature of things, for it suddenly went off down-stream with such a rush that it became utterly out of control. Before I could give line, it had the point of my rod down and smashed me up entirely. As I gazed at my broken cast, I saw this casual customer derisively throw itself high up out of the water about fifty yards below, as who should say: " Now, what about it, guv'nor ? "

This was the beginning and the end of our carefully-thought-out expedition to Loch Dianard. If I could believe the tall stories that had been told to me about its prolific character, it would appear that we were exceptionally unlucky on this occasion. One of the tales went, that an angler—a friend of the Bishop's—had, a few weeks previously, stood where the waters of the loch flow out into the open river, and had there accounted for *no less than eighteen salmon*, without moving from one spot.

A tall order indeed !

We were thoroughly disgruntled, and by the time we got back to the domestic hearth, I wished that Loch Dianard and all to do with it had been dried as hard as a turnpike road before I ever set out on this wearisome and wholly profitless expedition.

Towards the end of my tenancy, the more orthodox sports were fizzling out, so, as in the course of my latter days in the Orkneys, I turned my thoughts to sea-fishing, after having attempted the slaughter of sea-trout in the Kyles by trailing a sand-eel; a form of sport which has no attraction for me; especially when, as was the case here, it is so slack that the average works out at about three moderate-sized fish per week.

I had heard great accounts of the haddock and pollock fishing nearer the mouth of the Kyle, where it flows out into the open sea.

Therefore, I chartered a fishing boat and a native who was supposed to be learned in the ways of sea-fish, and how to catch them. I had intended taking only Bizzy with me; but my two brats implored me to allow them to come along, simply for the pleasure of being aboard the lugger and not because they had any hunch for fishing *per se.* Arrived at our proper points, the anchor was lowered, the angling gear prepared, and we made a start. Bizzy soon hauled up a very fine haddock, and I followed suit; so we began to think we were in for a good time; but suddenly we were aghast at seeing a huge maritime monster gliding along on the surface within a hundred yards of the boat. I could not make out what it was. It might have been a narwhal or a basking shark. We were gazing at it with interest, when I found that the boatman was hurriedly pulling up the anchor.

"What are you up to?" I inquired sharply.

"Man," he cried excitedly, "d'ye ken yon beastie; forrby, if we're no movin' the noo, ah'm thenken' that he'll be forr coomin' richt at us an' *upsetting the whole of us i' the sea!*"

Whereupon he seized the sculls and began pulling away for all he was worth. But the great creature went its way, apparently oblivious of our presence; so that the wind it had put up Neal (the said boatman) soon subsided. But wind of another kind arose and the surface of the water became somewhat violently agitated. Our boat was now rocking unpleasantly. First Denis and then Raymond were seized with sea-sickness, and imagined themselves to be nigh unto the doors of death.

Presently the waves were coming up the Kyles boisterously; and though the shore was within easy reach, it was bounded by jagged rocks, which forbade any attempt at landing, so that it became imperative that we rowed up the Kyle for more than a mile, against the tide and in the face of a storm which grew more violent every moment.

My thoughts flew back to the previous adventure which we had struck when rock-pigeon shooting in the Orkneys, as already chronicled. An added terror now encompassed me, the dreadful realization that my two beloved boys were with me to share the danger. As in the case mentioned, again we had a strenuous struggle under most trying conditions, until at last we were able to land in a sandy cove, a mile above where we had been fishing. It was with heartfelt thankfulness that Bizzy and I set foot on shore and lifted the sick children out of the boat, sending Neal with her to the Ribigill landing-stage.

We fondly imagined that all we had to do was to climb over the rocks and take a short cut to the house, which was not more than three quarters of a mile distant; but we were soon undeceived, for all of a sudden we *realized* that *we were in a trap!* The tide was now rising fast and threatened soon to cover the strip of sand on which we stood. We looked for a path, but there was none! The rocks, piled one upon the other, led to a steep slope, some two hundred yards in height, ere the brow of the cliff could be reached. I looked at Bizzy and Bizzy looked at me. By silent telepathy we perceived that a big risk must be forthwith taken. I hauled Raymond on to my back. Bizzy placed Denis in a similar position, and then we began one of the most nerve-racking climbs that it has ever been my misfortune to endure!

We had to haul each other over the rocks to begin with, and then we found that the slope was even steeper than we had imagined it to be when we first took stock of it. It was only by crawling with the greatest care that we managed to keep a foothold at all. Perspiring at every pore and obsessed with a nameless terror, we slowly progressed, inch by inch, with our inert burdens on our backs.

My heart almost stopped beating as I saw Bizzy, with Denis, make a slip, and slither half a dozen yards down the slope. Heaven be praised! a jutting rock held them up. Another ten feet and they would have been over the cliff and dashed to pieces on the rocks below! I had found a ledge on which I was able to take a breather. A stout bunch of heather was growing there, and by holding to this and placing Raymond by my side, I was able to let myself down until Bizzy could get a hold on my foot and lever himself up. We all kept together until we had recovered our breath and our nerve. Then, taking the now thoroughly terrified children pick-a-back again, we made another start; but the worst was over, and although the rest of the climb was anything but pleasant, the danger was not anything like so imminent as it had been. You can imagine our relief when, at last, we gained the brow of the cliff and saw a straight and easy walk to our temporary home, which, at one time, I feared none of us would ever set eyes on again. Not many words passed between Bizzy and myself during that trying ordeal; but, in after times, he has often told me of the horror which he experienced whilst we were making that nightmare ascent!

CHAPTER XXIV

I WAS so bucked up with my sport on the Harang beat of the Surendal that I determined to take the earliest opportunity of renewing my experiences of that delightful pitch, so was greatly disappointed when Colonel Whitmore informed me that he was not letting the following year.

As luck would have it, Mr. Archer—the Inspector of Fisheries—decided to put his holding on the Sand, on the market. I was quickly in communication with him, and arranged to take it over. To this fishing was attached "*Archer's Hüs*," a most convenient lodge for the purposes toward; but there was one little fly in the ointment, since the river was shared between Archer and his friend Hunter. At first the arrangement between them had been that the former should take the near, and the latter the far bank; but as this did not work particularly well, a new scheme had to be adopted, whereby Archer, or his representatives, were to fish for twelve hours of the twenty-four, and Hunter, or his lessees, the remaining twelve, alternately.

Now, in the early part of the season—that is to say during the months of June and July—the salmon ascended but a comparatively short distance from the fjord; so that only two good pools and a problematical run could be fished with any hope of success.

The lower, or *Aäsen*, Pool is really the estuary of the Sand itself; for, at the mouth, its sweet waters intermingle with those of the brackish fjord.

When fish were running, they generally put in an appearance as the tide flowed, and though some would push a long way up the pool, the majority would drop back with the ebb.

The other pool, known as the Great Foss, is one of the most celebrated and prolific on the whole of Norway. At its head is a fall of about forty feet, over which the waters surge and boil into the depths below.

The whole of it is rock-bound and rock-bottomed, and of great depth. It emerges therefrom between two great walls of stone, close set together, that are known as "Scylla" and "Charybdis."

Then there is a run of about fifty yards before the Aäsen Pool is reached; therein there are certain casts where, when the water is at the right height, a "pull" may be looked for.

The spring had been a cold one; consequently, our arrival proved to be somewhat premature, for our first fish was not registered until we had been in residence ten days. This was about June 20th, when I was the lucky one to open the score with a nineteen-pounder, which was a small fish as the Sand salmon go at this time of the year.

I must tell you that, as regards my first visit to the Sand, the same party that had foregathered at Harang was again assembled at Archer's Hüs: namely, my C.O., her brother Marcus, my versatile valet Bedford, and his wife Flora, the cook; not forgetting the irresponsible fox-terrier Billy, who again had been the cause of endless correspondence and official documents ere we were permitted to lead him, by a chain, on to the sacred shores of Norway.

Two natives were told off as our boatmen; both thoroughly efficient, reliable chaps of the best Norsk pattern. Lars Petersen, heftier of the two, was a long, limber fellow, with a deeply tanned skin and a black beard. Somewhat gruff and abrupt, though obviously well-meaning and as keen as mustard. The other, Tollë Svensen, was of a different type, being very fair, with deep blue eyes and of much lesser stature than his colleague. He also sported "face fungus"; which, according to the playfulness of 1922, would have elicited the exclamation "Beaver!" from any of the gallant hunters devoted to the ridiculous but mildly exciting stunt.

I was much struck by the quiet, unobtrusive manner of the last-mentioned descendant of the Vikings. Therefore I attached him to my person in preference to the rougher Lars. I may say at once that Tollë proved to be a priceless attendant—a waterman of the first order and primed with all the ways and wiles of the local salmon. He knew where to fish and when to fish; whilst his stroke with the gaff was one of deadly accuracy.

The first of the bigger fish fell to Marcus, who had arisen at four o'clock one morning for the purpose of fishing the *Aäsen* Pool with a prawn. He was attended by Lars. When Tollë and I came down, an hour later, we found the last-named on the strand. But Marcus himself had returned to the Hüs to snatch a hurried breakfast.

"Any sport?" I inquired of his boatman.

"One fish, twenny-seex pund."

"Oh, lead me to it!" I said.

Sure enough, there on the grass, beside the boat-house, lay a beautiful hen-fish of the weight mentioned;—a great bar of silver and steel-blue, with the sea-lice still adhering to her shimmering scales.

This was a good omen for my own sport, so I lost no time in getting to work.

I had one or two rises at the "Wilkinson" with which I was fishing, and managed to pull out a nice fifteen-pounder. There followed a slack time; but, as Tollë suggested, I fixed up a prawn and started harling. A few lengths from the furthest swim, off the point of the estuary, a tremendous "rug" proved that something of extra size had attached itself. I don't think I will trouble you with a description of the fight which followed. Not only is one such so like another, but I must reserve details for a description of the desperate struggle which, later on, I waged with the biggest salmon I have ever caught. This will be narrated anon. Suffice it to say that the present customer kept me in a state of nervous excitement and muscular endeavour for some twenty minutes before we landed on the strand, where I put on the final pressure and Tollë waded in to gaff and lift it ashore, a magnificent cock-fish of *forty-two pounds!*

It tickled my fancy to have a mild joke at the expense of Marcus; so I removed *his* fish to another spot and covered it with grass, dumping my monster in its place.

By and by, down came my young friend from the Hüs, all eagerness to renew the attack.

"Any luck, Cockie?" he shouted as he drew near.

"Not much," I said. "By the way, you caught a decent fish before breakfast, didn't you?"

"I should smile—why I got a beauty of twenty-six pounds! That's good enough surely?"

"Not half," I said casually; "you don't call that a fish? Come and look at mine."

Whereupon I led him to my magnificent victim. He was struck dumb with amazement.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, "that's a beauty, and no mistake; but where's mine? I left it here!"

"I'm very sorry, old chap," I replied, "but I thought you wouldn't mind if I *used it as bait for this one.*"

His reply was terse and somewhat rude.

"Oh, you be damned!" he exclaimed, turning away.

Two days later, I was fishing the Foss Pool, which at that time was rather high. There was but a small space on the further side, and even this could be fished only with difficulty, as there was a high rock behind the angler, with a dense growth of large bushes at its base. The fly had to be "flicked" in; but as the fish generally congregated there to escape the terrific rush of the main stream, it was not necessary to get the lure far out. The "Wilkinson" was again my chosen fly. The very first time that I succeeded in manœuvring it into a favourable position, it was seized by "a whopper." It was then a matter of "Pull, devil; pull, baker," and resolved itself into a question of which was the stronger—the fish or myself and my tackle. Unless I could contrive to keep him in the backwater, I knew it would be all up with me; for once in the main stream no rod or line that was ever made would hold him; so I put on every ounce of strain that my rod would stand. To cut a long story short, I had the fish in such a position that, in the absurdly brief space of six minutes, Tollë, lying prone on the slab of rock at my feet and using a very long-handled gaff, was able to strike effectively and haul up from the depths a glorious cock-fish, the exact counterpart of the one I had caught a few days previously in the *Aäsen* Pool. The same colouring, the same lines of symmetry and the same weight to an ounce—I am figuring that these two resplendent fishes were twins!

For about three weeks our sport continued good. The larger fish were the first to run, they being followed by others of lesser dimensions, and then came the grilse, the majority of which, I was sorry to observe, had their silvery scales badly scarred by the meshes of the salmon-nets, which had been established in far too many positions in the fjord. During one of my day's fishing, having plied the fly in vain, I thought I would give a brown phantom minnow a chance, but spun the whole of the *Aäsen* Pool without being rewarded by a touch; so I told Tollë to bring the scow about and row back to the landing strand. I wound up my line and placed it at the stern of the boat. But somehow the trace and minnow, unobserved by myself, got loose, so that the lure was skittering along the surface about two yards astern. Suddenly there was a great boil and a "splosh," as a salmon had the impertinence and audacity to make a dash at the phantom; though it failed to lay hold. I had the presence of mind to tilt the top of my rod over and so to sink the spinner, when immediately the fish came again and was firmly attached. It proved to be a nice fresh-run customer of twenty-two pounds. I am not aware whether any of my brothers of the angle have had a similar experience, but such a method of gathering salmon is surely a novelty!

When the raging Foss Pool was just a bit above its normal level there was only one way in which I could hope to get a salmon, and that was by Tollë rowing swiftly across one of the currents, and holding the scow in mid-stream. He told me that he could keep the boat in position for seven minutes, *and seven minutes only*—fish or no fish; and that then he would have to wrench her back to the landing plateau.

"What would happen if you stayed any longer?" I asked.

"Boat carried deun steum, yeu tink, and then yeu dreun!"

"Thank you very much, and so forth," I murmured; "but where do *you* come in, Tollë?"

"I not come in at all—I dreun teu!"

This was a lively look-out! But having great confidence in my boatman, I submitted myself to his care, and was soon placed in the precarious position, but took jolly good care to have my watch in one hand, while I essayed to cast with the other. I was taking no risks, and had no intention of cutting it fine; so at the end of *six* minutes I yelled " Time ! ! " whereupon Tollë turned the scow round and shot her into safety.

I had not had time to wind up, so about twenty yards of line, with my " black doctor " at its extremity, trailed out and was swept deep down into the depths.

After I had landed, I began reeling in, when I found myself fast in some obstruction. As I put a strain on to get loose, I was conscious of a movement such as no snag or rock could cause.

" Yeu'm got fisk, yeu tink ! " exclaimed Tollë excitedly.

Faith, I had; for it seems that a salmon had laid hold of the fly as it was being swirled round and round on a loose line, amid the raging waters. I brought the fish to the gaff in safety, a very welcome eighteen-pounder. Here was another example of taking a salmon in unexpected fashion !

Toward the end of July the water ran very low, and came gently over the Foss, minus the roar and rattle which hitherto had marked its fall.

The narrow strait between Scylla and Charybdis no longer surged with a tumult of waters. In fact, it was so pacific that we were able to pass in the scow to the straits below quite comfortably.

The weather was now set fine, so it was hopeless to look for fish, except very late at night and early in the morning; even at such times very little reward followed our efforts.

Marcus gave it up as a bad job, devoting himself to promenading the modest streets of Sand and giving the Norsk maidens a treat.

One day I had a brain-wave.

My keen eye of observation had noticed the movements of a salmon under a ledge of rock which jutted out from " Scylla." Mounting a very small " black doctor " of sea-trout size, I was able, by a long cast, to reach the position which I judged the fish was occupying. These tactics proved successful, for I pulled out, not one—but *five* fish, and lost three others! They were not of considerable size, the largest scaling only fifteen pounds and the smallest not much bigger than a top-hole grilse. I renewed the attack on several occasions, but never quite so successfully as on my initial attempt. Finally, it would seem that I had exhausted the stock, for my last attempt proved utterly futile. So I abandoned the Foss altogether, and devoted my attention to certain holes or "pockets," which lay at the base of the rocks which bounded the *Aăsen* Pool. Here I rigged up a prawn on a single hook, with a leaded line, and manœuvred it on the "sink and swim" principle. In this fashion I added half a dozen more fish (of which one fine fellow weighed thirty-two pounds) to our tally.

We were now nearing the limit of my tenancy. Day by day conditions became more and more impossible. Such fish as came up were so intent on ascending the salmon ladder and betaking themselves to the higher pools, that they utterly refused to abide in the Foss for our amusement. So I passed the time in investigating the means by which the native fisherman obtained the fine halibut which I had seen come into the port. I found that their method was as follows:

A number of empty, water-tight barrels had attached to them the lines, gear and bait requisite for the capture of the great fish. These gigantic "trimmers" were set afloat, but secured to the shore of the fjord by a light line about fifty yards in length. When the halibut seized the bait, this attachment would be forthwith broken, and away would go the barrel, careering out into deep water. Then the watchful fisherman would pursue it in a scow, and, on overtaking it, would hoist it into his craft, and then proceed to pull the great semi-flat fish out of its native element by the scruff of the neck!

I have seen many good pike caught with trimmers, but I had no idea that ponderous halibut—which might weigh as much as 150 lbs.—could be captured in what was practically an identical manner.

So ended my first visit to the celebrated Sand river.

Six years passed away before I again visited it. On this occasion I had taken unto myself a partner to share the expense of my enterprise and all its possibilities. This newcomer, Tom Lambert, was an old hand at every form of sport; whilst his cheery and attractive young wife was as keen as mustard, especially as regards angling for the lordly salmon. My C.O. was in evidence again, and later on the irrepressible Teddy Maurice put in an appearance, bringing with him a marvellous invention of his own, which was supposed to prevent that regrettable accident known as an " overwind." We all stood on the rocky bank of the Foss Pool, intent on observing his manipulation of this astonishing contraption.

Presently he became attached to a fish—apparently of negligible size—but he was so busy engineering the product of his inventive brain that he quite lost touch with it. Teddy was obviously ill at ease, but, in order to impress us to the contrary, kept attempting to light his pipe, whereby he wasted a whole boxful of matches. He " played " (if, indeed, such a demonstration could be so called) the salmon for fully an hour. Then the fish, being evidently tired of swimming round and round the pool *on a slack line*, quietly sailed away between Scylla and Charybdis, taking out the whole of the angler's line and backing, straightening his rod, and breaking him to blazes!

We others came to the conclusion that we would *not* adopt Teddy's weird invention, though we were bound to admit that, since the salmon had stripped the reel clean, *there could be no question of an overwind!* So perhaps our volatile friend was justified in claiming that his invention was " IT."

But again I find myself anticipating.

We had commenced fishing about the middle of June, and immediately hit on a run of remarkably ponderous fish. I may here and now state that by the time our tenancy was up, we had accounted for *forty-seven fish, averaging* 25⅜ lbs., an extraordinary figure, which I believe constitutes a record.

In the sporting papers I have challenged all and sundry to put forward an authentic figure which would lower it, but, so far, my brothers of the angle have remained silent.

In the previous chapter I ventured to suggest that descriptions of fights with monster salmon have been overdone, and that the details of such encounters are apt to pan out somewhat monotonously; but when an enthusiast, such as I claim to be, has for years hankered after *a fifty-pounder*, and then has secured one only a few ounces short of the desired weight, I think it is up to him to describe when and where such a momentous affair happened. So off we go!

One day I had been fishing the *Aäsen* Pool steadily all the early morning without having anything to show for my labours.

After breakfast Tom and I entered the scow with Tollë, to have another dart, just to show there was no animosity, though the conditions were anything but favourable. As usual, we started off with the fly, but neither of us met with the ghost of a rise. Then we tried a prawn with no better result. After that—just for a lark—I affixed a weird *mother-o'-pearl* spinner, which had been presented to me by a neophyte friend, who had had it dumped upon him by an unconscionable tackle-maker. Of course, this venture of mine was laughed to scorn by my companion. Tollë's steady blue eyes opened wider than I had ever seen them do before. I think he had an idea that the continual run of bad luck had affected my brain!

But just as the scow came within a few lengths of where the brackish water of the tide was meeting the glacier stream, suddenly a great body surged up from the depths and over my despised spinner, and snapped it hard and good. In doing so, the fish came half out of the water, thus exposing its mighty proportions. Tom nearly fell backwards into the bows of the boat with astonishment?

"My God, Cockie, what a fish!" he yelled. "It can't be a salmon; I believe you're foul of a porpoise or a shark."

Whatever it was that had taken a fancy to my decorative lure, it went down deep, seeming hardly to realize what it was up against, for some time elapsed before it attempted a run; but when it did, oh, my aunt! it was some run, believe me! I had no chance to check it until my whole line and half its backing was ripped off; whilst my finger was cut half-way to the bone. At last the fish turned and came towards us. I shouted to Tollë to row for his life, whilst I snatched in the slack, hand over hand, until I had a direct feel of the fish.

I had no earthly chance to reel in after the orthodox fashion. Next, the brute went deep again, suddenly stopped, and then began "jiggering," in that nerve-racking fashion which is apt to reduce the angler to the verge of impotence and neurasthenia.

In order to counteract this manœuvre, I tried the administration of half a dozen short, sharp jerks; for I had no doubt as to the strength of the tackle which I was using, and I knew that the treble flights which were attached to that fearsome spinner must be well implanted in the victim's jaws. This counterstroke of mine had the desired effect, for the fish suddenly stopped his bulldog-like worryings, and made another terrific run; but it did not get as much of my line out as before, so I was able to turn him ere he had traversed fifty yards. And so the battle waged, first the fish and then the angler getting the best of it. After about forty minutes, I thought I had His Nibs in a reasonable frame of mind, so ordered Tollë to pull gently to the strand, where it was our custom to land in order to fight out the final stages of our struggles with the various fish which we had in hand.

This one was now swimming deep, but quite steadily, about ten yards from, and parallel with, us. As soon as our scow landed, Tom and I jumped out, and I had another ten minutes' fight with the fish, which was now running short and sullenly. At last, I having manœuvred him into a favourable position, Tollë waded in with the gaff; but no sooner did the great salmon (for salmon indeed it was) catch sight of Tollë's submerged legs, than it was off again with a tremendous rush! All I could do was to scramble back into the boat. Tom remained on shore, but Lars, who had been watching the performance with wide-eyed astonishment, took his place, and we shoved off just in time to avert a catastrophe.

The fish was going so fast towards the mouth of the estuary that it was necessary for the two boatmen to row for all they were worth, as again the whole of my line and most of the backing was out. Never did the salmon stop, in the *Aäsen*, but went careering at express speed some hundred yards out into the fjord itself, and then went fathoms deep!

By this time, the inhabitants of Sand had gathered on the landing-stage to watch the sport, and to encourage us with lusty shouts and cheers.

Now, I had a unique experience, which reminded me of the time when I had to reel up cod-fish off the Orkneys from forty fathoms of water, as previously described.

Strange salmon angling this, my friends!

Well, at last I managed to raise the great fish to the surface, where it began rolling about like a disgruntled porpoise, entangling itself in the cast, which thus became wrapped round its body and gills. It was dead-beat, but the question then arose as to how, when gaffed, it could be lifted into the scow. But the attempt had to be made, unless we chose to risk towing it along behind us to a more favourable position. But, thank goodness, Tollë and Lars between them managed to hoist our "catch" over the gunwale; though in so doing we were within an ace of turning turtle and so messing up the whole kaboodle and perhaps meeting with a watery end.

Then we rowed back in triumph, amid the acclamations of the populace.

Forty-nine pounds, nine ounces exactly. By no manner of legitimate means could the steel be induced to register one jot or tittle more. Tom suggested that I should cram a large stone down the throat of the corpse, so that, haply, it might "weigh in" correctly; but I did not think that this was altogether "cricket!"

Thus my soaring ambition to account for a salmon *of fifty pounds* still remains unsatisfied. To be so near and yet so far is certainly most aggravating; but all and sundry to whom I have narrated the foregoing circumstances have poured sympathetic balm upon my feelings by assuring me that I am absolutely justified in claiming this remarkably fine specimen of the *salar* species *as a genuine fifty-pounder!*

I may add that I studiously tried that mother-o'-pearl phantasy times out of number; but never another salmon, or any other fish, deigned to take the slightest notice of it.

Anyhow, it was a grand cock-fish in magnificent condition and absolutely fresh-run. It fought me valiantly for *an hour and twenty minutes* before it yielded to the inevitable.

This was the only fish over forty pounds that fell to our lot on the occasion of this, my second visit to the Sand; but we had quite a number over thirty pounds, the biggest of which (thirty-seven pounds) fell to the skilfully wielded rod of Mary Lambert, who also had others of thirty and thirty-two pounds; whilst I took one of thirty-five and lost another, probably a few pounds heavier, in rather curious and certainly aggravating fashion.

I was fishing with fly (a "Wilkinson") the swift run which connects the Foss Pool with the *Aäsen;* whilst Tom and his wife stood on the rocks above watching me cast. Almost immediately I got fast in a very big fish, which headed down-stream in an attempt to reach the lower pool. I managed to thwart its intention, and, after a time, had the salmon beaten to a frazzle; but I was in a *cul-de-sac* and could proceed no further. The salmon was some twelve yards below me, *tail down the stream,* which was running so strongly that it was quite *impossible to drag the fish against it.* I could see it plainly, and judged it to be about thirty-seven pounds. I was never in such a hopeless position. I have often wondered what I ought to have done under the circumstances. It seems to me that the only hope of success would have been to have allowed the salmon to drift gradually and quietly to the head of the *Aäsen*—a distance of about seventy-five yards, then, if I could have crawled up the rocks, I might possibly have shifted the line as I progressed until I could gain the Pool.

But this operation would have had to be carried out "blind," as it were, for the rocks inevitably would have hidden the fish from my sight.

But it is no use discussing what "might have been" except from an academic point of view. All I could do was to make futile attempts to drag the weighty fish up against the stream. All the time I was doing so, it was shaking its head violently and continuously; so that it was not long before it succeeded in wearing itself loose. Then it slithered away down-stream, lost to sight and (by no means) to memory dear.

Tom and Mary told me that, from where they were standing on the rocks above, they could see exactly what happened when the fish took my fly. They said it was a wonderful sight to see it dart up from a deep hole and come right over the lure, with a perfect " head and tail rise." They declared that they had never witnessed anything like it!

Three weeks later, I caught, in the *Aäsen* Pool, what I am convinced was this identical customer. If so, it was now in wretched condition, and weighed barely thirty pounds; whilst its upper jaws bore a deep blue cicatrice which undoubtedly had been caused by a hook. From its appearance I judged that the original wound had been inflicted at about the time when I struck, played and lost the salmon in the straits.

Our deeds of derring do so stimulated the ambition of my C.O. that one day she begged me to take her fishing, though never previously had she shown any desire to share in the sport.

At the time I speak of, the river had run low, and we had to resort to the tactics which had been employed, during similar conditions, on the occasion of my previous visit to the Sand, that is to say, that the only chance of a fish was to ply a prawn on the " sink and swim " principle in the deep holes which lay under the precipitous rocks of the *Aäsen* Pool.

Thither I took the C.O. and fixed her up with the right tackle. With the proverbial luck of the beginner, she had hardly let her prawn down when she had a hefty pull.

" Strike! " I exclaimed excitedly. " Strike! " Whereupon she hit the surface of the water violently with her rod.

" What on earth are you doing? " I cried.

" *You told me to strike!* " she screamed.

Of course the fish had made itself scarce. I explained to her the *modus operandi*, so that the next venturesome salmon which accepted her offering was duly attached. It was evidently a fair-sized fish, and when it felt the prick of the hook was off like lightning. Instead of giving out line or allowing the fish to strip it from the reel, the C.O. held on like grim death and for all she was worth; so that she was in danger of being pulled overboard, or of having her rod and tackle smashed to smithereens.

" Let it go! let it go! " I shouted.

" Let it go, you fool! " she gasped with withering emphasis. " *I came here to catch salmon not to let them go!* "

I had a deal of trouble to explain to her that the fish must be given line, but at last she became wise to my instructions, and handled the salmon quite effectively.

When the psychological moment arrived, we put her ashore to finish the fight. By this time she was more beat than the fish. Her hair was loose and falling over her face, and she was puffing like a grampus.

I suggested that I should lend a helping hand, but she wouldn't have it at any price, exclaiming:

"If I can't snatch the salmon on my own, then it can go hang!"

Well, she was as good as her word, so at last Tollë was able to strike home with the gaff, and lay a fine nineteen-pounder at the feet of the C.O., who thereupon collapsed and went into hysterics. This was the first and last time that she ever tried salmon-fishing!

"I told you I *could* and *would* catch a salmon, Cockie dear," she said, "but having done so I am going to quit. This is no game for one whose view of the essentials of life is the enjoyment of perfect peace and repose."

THE SECOND VISIT TO THE SAND RIVER

Much to our delight the weather changed and what was at first only a drizzle soon developed into a steady downpour. At the same time the thermometer registered eighty degrees of heat; consequently, the snows in the watershed of the Sand liquefied speedily and a big spate came down. The torrent again roared over the fall of the Foss, and the whole of the basin boiled and surged furiously, rushing between the straits of Scylla and Charybdis in one huge, irresistible volume. For a day or two fishing was impossible, but when the flood had subsided sufficiently, we had a renewal of sport, or rather I had personally, for I happened to discover a method of fishing which was most effective, though decidedly difficult. I knew that a large concourse of salmon was waiting in the deep pool under the Foss for an opportunity to ascend it by the salmon ladders, in order to gain the upper reaches of the river, as was their custom towards the end of July. No boat could come within casting distance; therefore, my plan was to stand on a ledge of rock some forty yards below. I rigged up my ten-foot spinning rod, and affixed to my line three feet of twisted gut, to which was attached a prawn threaded on a large, single hook. Three feet above this was a lead, weighing a quarter of a pound. When all was ready, I coiled my line and slung the weight right up into the boil of the fall, where it immediately sank, and was rolled by the strong current along the bottom *towards me.* All the while, I kept drawing in line, at the same time keeping a feel on the lead. I presume that the three feet of gut trace were swinging loose; but when a salmon seized the lure, I could feel the pull plainly enough. Immediately I would strike hard and good.

In this fashion hardly a day passed without my accounting for a good fish or two. Tom Lambert, Teddy Maurice, and even Bedford tried their hand at the game (though it was far too strenuous a one for Mary to attempt). Somehow or other none of them found the knack, so all their efforts proved futile, though I did my best to instruct them in the art which I termed "*prawn punching.*" There came a time when I was short of prawns, so, as an experiment, substituted a large-sized "Jock Scot." To my surprise and delight the change of lure made but little difference to my average catch, for—as when fishing in mid-stream with Tollë, as previously described—a salmon attached itself while my fly was being whirled loose in the current; thus I got many a good pull when "punching." I must confess that I was constantly hung up in rocks and snags at the bottom of the pool, and so lost more casts and traces than I cared about. Once, when pulling loose, I drew up a tangle of no less than five derelict casts, one of which was my own; the rest evidently having been lost by unfortunate anglers in far-off days.

I am now approaching one of the saddest experiences that ever befell me.

There came to reside at a "Hüs"—about a mile distant from Archer's—a certain distinguished General and his wife. With them were their daughter, a pretty, fair girl of about twenty, her fiancé (a young naval officer) and a dark-haired flapper cousin of about fifteen. This party would often come to the Foss Pool in order to watch our proceedings.

One day Lars took them over the top of the Foss to show them where the salmon, after ascending it, were wont to rest in a shallow sluice, before proceeding up-river.

Now it seems that this greatly interested the girls—especially the younger one. One day, whilst I was in the boat below with Tollë, and when Tom and Teddy Maurice were just coming down from the "Hüs" to relieve me and take their turn, to my horror I saw the two girls leaping from boulder to boulder on the summit of the Foss, alone and unattended. I was just about to direct Tollë to row ashore and to run round to warn them of the danger they were in, when suddenly *I saw the elder girl slip!*

Immediately afterwards there was a terrible shriek. At the same time I caught a momentary glimpse of a white, struggling figure *being borne over the brink of the raging Foss and carried by the cataract to the depths below!*

Then another figure was seen to take a header into the boil of waters!

This proved to be the young sailor, who, witnessing what had befallen his fiancée, had plunged, without hesitation, to what appeared to be a certain death; for to *swim* in such a tumult of waters was utterly impossible. Then another, but smaller body, was launched from the rocks into the pool. A spaniel dog, seeing what his master had attempted, had immediately followed suit!

Of course the gallant lad had not the remotest chance of rescuing his beloved, for she had disappeared utterly, drawn down to the depths by the relentless force of the torrent. Even then she must have been beyond all human succour.

A double tragedy, however, was averted by the merest chance; for the swirling currents whirled the young officer against a rock, where he managed to grip an interstice, and to hold on until Lars hitched a gaff into his clothing and held him up until Tom and Teddy Maurice came to the rescue.

Now all this takes a long time to describe, but as it happened it was only a matter of a few seconds, Meanwhile, the unfortunate mother (the General was not present) was shrieking in an agony of terror and despair. In her ravings she cursed us for a lot of cowards, who would make no attempt to save her child! Of course, it was utterly impossible for Tollë to row anywhere near the fall of the Foss, in fact he could not move a single yard up-stream. I knew this; so directly I saw what had happened I bade him wrench the scow back to the landing-stage, where I seized a long-handled gaff and ran as quickly as I could lay heels to the ground to the mouth of the straits, thinking that perhaps the poor girl would be borne past me, where, by hanging on with one hand to an ash sapling which overgrew the water, I could just cover the breadth of the narrows.

Hardly was I posted, when I saw a mass being swirled towards me; but as it was swept past, I recognized it as the spaniel dog which, being carried by the stream near the surface, had escaped the fatal "under-tow" which had dragged its mistress to her death. The dog was carried swiftly down through the straits, and into the *Aăsen* Pool, where it landed, safe and sound, on the shelving beach.

By this time there was a large assembly on the banks of the Foss Pool. Another scow was brought along and a careful search made; but it was fully an hour and a half before we set eyes on the luckless girl. She was found in twenty feet of slack water, where, on the edge of the main stream, it was so clear that we could see her lying there on her back, with her long golden hair swept over her face by the shifting currents. By lashing a gaff on to an eighteen-foot salmon rod, we were able to draw the poor creature to the surface and into the scow. When we landed, the grief and despair of the poor mother was piteous to behold. Seeing that she was utterly distraught we took no notice of her reiterated curses upon us for not having saved her child!

I may here state that, a few days later, she called upon us and begged us to forgive her for accusing us of cowardice; for now she realized how utterly impossible it was for any human being to have averted the tragedy, when once the victim was over the fall.

The younger girl, too, was prostrate with grief; but when she became coherent, she explained how the accident had happened.

It seems that she had persuaded her cousin to crawl over the rocks, in order to reach the sluice where the salmon rested. At first all went well. One of the runlets had to be passed before the resting basin was reached. The near side of this was higher than the other, which made it easy to spring over on the *outward* journey; but in *returning* her companion had miscalculated the width, and, catching her foot on the higher ledge, she slipped backward into the trough and was immediately carried down it and over the Foss!

As you may well imagine, following this tragedy, the Foss Pool lost its fascination for me. After the poor girl was buried, I did essay to fish it once or twice, but without heart. Every time I gazed on the sinister fall I recalled the horrors of that fatal morning. This eerie feeling might have worn itself out in time, but one morning on arriving at the Pool I perceived, to my amazement, that its water was as white and opaque as milk.

"Why, what's the meaning of this?" I asked of Tollë.

He shook his head ominously.

"Some bank give way oop abeuve. Watter come deun like dis for long time, yeu tink!"

"How long?" I asked gloomily.

"Perhaps a veek, perhaps dree veeks, yeu tink."

This was a nice look-out, considering that there were only ten days more of my tenancy to run.

We were now joined by Tom and Mary (Teddy Maurice had already departed), and they were struck dumb by the catastrophe which had befallen.

Sure enough the section of bank which had subsided some two miles above us was a very ponderous one.

I subsequently heard that it was not washed clear until three weeks after we had departed.

During our last week's stay I tried trout-fishing in the lagoons of the river itself. Some of them I was able to wade, the others I fished from a boat.

I succeeded in catching a good number of trout, averaging about three to the two pounds, the largest being two and a half pounds. Pretty sport in its way, but to my mind "small deer" compared with salmon, though many experienced anglers hold that *salmo salar* "has nothing on" *salmo trutta*, or even *salmo fario*, as the acme of the angler's desire!

CHAPTER XXV

FROM my earliest days it has been dinned into me that Connemara, otherwise the wild and woolly west of Ireland, was (I use the verb advisedly) El Dorado of the enthusiastic angler. The beauty spot thereof—a veritable oasis in the desert—is Ballinahinch Castle and its demesne. Now it happened that the proprietor of this desirable pitch was a Raleigh Club friend of mine, one Dick Berridge, who also had forgathered with me at the Gun Club and at Hurlingham.

He was a keen shooter of big game—the draw of wildest Africa was continually pulling him. There came a time when he packed up his armoury with a view to cavorting in search of lions, buffalo and other fearsome fowl, in the recesses of the Dark Continent. He happened to mention to me at the club one day that it was his intention to let his beautiful Castle, with all its sporting rights, for the term of one year. Here was my opportunity, and I seized upon it with alacrity. When all the preliminaries and formalities were completed, I started across the Irish Channel with my entourage; but on arrival at Cashel I was informed by Mr. Matthews, my friend's agent, that the Castle was not quite ready for our reception, so we took up quarters at Johnnie O'Lochlan's well-known hostelry in the village. From thence I wandered forth on the Ballinahinch river in eager search of the *salmonidæ*, both of the *salar* and *trutta* varieties But before doing so I cast a fly over the waters which were held by the hostelry presided over by the said Johnnie O'Lochlan, who, among other offices, held that of resident magistrate. I had one or two days with the sea-trout, but seldom took more than half a dozen fish of herling age. Never a salmon came my way, for at that time the waters were rather low.

The first day I essayed the Ballinahinch river—commencing at Blackadder—I came across a pool where several salmon were showing; but, though they rose to or followed my lures, devil a one did I touch; albeit I patiently presented to them every pattern of fly which I possessed.

Pushing forward for something over a mile I came to the lower of the Castle lagoons. Here, standing on a promontory which jutted into the water, I had some bright sport with the sea-trout, and nearly filled my creel with fresh-run fish, though none of them was of great size—the largest going but little over the pound, and most of them being herling.

Whilst so engaged Mr. Matthews put in an appearance and informed me that all would be ready for our reception in three days' time.

This Ballinahinch reserve was indeed an oasis, set in a wilderness of wild wastes, bare rocks, coarse stag grass and stunted gorse. Pages might be filled in describing its glories, but it is up to me to tell of sport rather than to draw vivid pictures of local colouring. The Castle itself was a grand edifice, replete with every luxury and convenience. Therein we settled down with much rejoicing. Visions of sport crowded upon us, but the drought, which had held the land for several weeks, continued to depreciate our chances. Ere a change in the weather occurred I was joined by that ardent sportsman, Teddy Maurice, the hero of "The Tin-spoon adventure," as narrated in a previous chapter. He arrived escorting my two younger sons, Denis and Lionel, then lads of fifteen and thirteen respectively, the latter bringing with him a miniature Zoo, consisting of rats, mice, rabbits, guinea-pigs, frogs, toads, snakes and lizards. I regret to say that these callow offspring of mine had no taste for "the art of the angle," which was in direct contradiction of the laws of heredity. They simply turned up their noses contemptuously when I suggested that I should initiate them to the sport which had appealed to me so insistently from the days of my early boyhood.

Day after day we watched the fleeting clouds and prayed for that downpour which had been so long delayed, and which was so ardently desired for the purposes of sport. But for a time nothing happened; nevertheless, we were a merry party and thoroughly enjoyed ourselves *malgrè* the perverse conditions.

When at last Jupiter Pluvius condescended to loose his waterworks our spirits rose, and so did the river and lakes. But it is possible to have too much of a good thing, for soon we found that the river and the whole chain of loughs were in high flood; so again we had to sit tight and possess our souls in patience. At last the day arrived when the flooded waters had subsided to exactly the right height, whilst the wind was in a favourable direction. Then we had glorious sport with the sea-trout on the lower Ballinahinch lake. I found that the most killing fly was the "Zulu"—not that with the usual *red* tag, but sporting one of *a dull buff colour.* When the surface was fairly rough I found this fly most killing. Later on I tried an experiment, using various tags, red, yellow, green and blue affixed to the orthodox black hackle, and I found that particular conditions suited each in turn.

The largest fish fell to my rod—a four and a half pounder—and between us we accounted for many, running from one and a half pounds to three pounds each together with dozens of herling; but though there were plenty of salmon in the lake and the river, they were very stiff and dour.

We had arrived at our destination about the middle of August, but it was not until the end of the first week in September that, when fishing a stretch of river between the lower lake and the Castle, I became attached to a lordly fish. I was not expecting one of these; my flight being made up of sea-trout flies, attached to a fine-gut cast. Under these circumstances I had not much hope of landing the joker, so was not altogether surprised when, after ten minutes' careful manipulation, he made a terrific run and smashed me to smithereens!

A week later our head boatman, Larry Coleman, informed us that there was a cast at the head of the Castle Lake known as "Sna Beg" (which, being translated from the Erse, signifies "small swim"), where, now that the water was at the right height, a grand chance was offered us of taking a salmon or two.

This same Larry Coleman had as lieutenant one Micky Magee, of Simian countenance, side whiskers and that pretty wit for which the inhabitants of Connemara are famous. But the two were always at loggerheads. As soon as one made a statement the other flatly contradicted it.

This was the sort of thing that went on. Let us suppose that Teddy and I have just taken our seats in the boat which Coleman has pushed off :

Myself. " This should be a good day, Larry ? "

Larry. " Indade, an ut whill, sorr ! "

Micky. " It will *not!* Faith ! there's teu much sun."

Larry. " Shure, yez don't knaw phwat yez tarkin' about, yez ormadhaun ! "

(Time passes and my companion selects his flies.)

Teddy. " What do you think of this 'fiery Brown,' Larry ? It ought to do the trick, I think."

Larry. " An' indade ut's a foine floi, yer 'anner. Ut is that ! "

Micky (on the bow thwart, gloomily). " Faith, ut's naw good ut all ut all. Divil a fish whill look at ut ! "

(And so on and so forth all day and every day.)

The information we had received about Sna Beg proved accurate enough. This cast was in the narrows which connect the Castle Lake with the next of the chain, called Glendalough. Here I placed my guest, on the ledge of rock commanding the narrows ; whilst I proceeded in the boat with Coleman to a rock which lay at the mouth of the strait. I began fishing with a " claret and jay." Before I had cast this half a dozen times I was into a lively fish which, when brought to net, pulled the scale at eleven pounds. I rose another, but it failed to attach itself. Meanwhile, Teddy, excellent angler though he was, had thrashed the narrows without any response. I found him at his stance, and caught a gleam of envy, hatred and malice in his eye. This saturnine expression was fearfully accentuated when, casually casting my lure across the waters, it was immediately seized by a fish which was successfully landed, a fresh-run nine-pounder.

But this sort of pleasantry did not continue, for it was many days before another salmon came to hand. This I caught in a very beautiful pool—just above the Castle—named Corrah More.

About the last week in September the fish in the river began to move; but as a blazing sun poured remorselessly down day after day, our only chance of securing one was to wait until Phœbus had retired to rest on his western couch. As soon as his last golden rays had disappeared below the horizon, it was our custom to commence operations, and by these tactics we managed, between us, to pick up a fair number of fish. The salmon in these parts do not run to size, the biggest of the bunch which fell to our lot being but fifteen pounds, which was quite five pounds above the average. A few monsters were to be seen, bulging and rolling in the pools, but we never had the luck to get hold of one.

About the end of the first week in October the fish woke up with a vengeance, and developed a gargantuan appetite. Then they would take almost any fly that was presented to them, though they showed a decided preference for a local pattern termed "The Fenian," a medium-sized fly, with a body half-green and half-orange, with a mixed hackle. So voracious were the salmon now that I believe an old boot attached to a meat-hook, on the end of a rope, would have been eagerly snapped up.

I flatter myself that I put in a rather good performance one day on the further lagoon below the Castle. This piece of water holds a good many salmon and sea-trout, whilst others are continually running through it, but, according to Larry Coleman, no device that any angler could put in force would have the remotest chance of meeting with a response; the reason given being that the pool was very deep, and had a black peaty bottom without any submerged rocks or other hides from which the fish could rise to the fly. On the occasion to which I refer, the salmon had been rampaging throughout the lower reaches of the fishing. I had caught three in a strip of river which joined the two lagoons, all of them gravid hen-fish, which I returned to the water after marking them.

Seeing that the salmon were well on the move in the lagoon below, I determined to test the accuracy of Larry's information. So I told him to get the boat in order, so that I might fish the most likely-looking spots. I was using an old fourteen-foot green-heart rod, which had been lying by for some fifteen years. As matters turned out, I shattered Larry's theory to atoms, and established a record, if his statement was true; for we had not drifted more than half a dozen yards before I was into a fish. I had just reduced it to sweet reasonableness and was reeling in, when snap! bang! My rod broke in the centre of the second joint, so that the dismembered portion slipped down the line and entered the water. Here was a pretty go! Of course my best chance would have been to land and hand-haul the fish; but I was intent on getting up another record as regards my own experiences. I continued to play it from the boat as best I could. When I had wound in until the top ring of the derelict section was against the salmon's nose, I seized hold of the other extremity, and relinquished the butt; then, after a most interesting conflict, I actually managed to bring the salmon to net. A cock-fish of twelve pounds.

This freakish performance reminds me of an experience which I had in after years when fishing my friend Herbert Beddington's glorious stretch of the Blackwater, at Ballyhooly, County Cork.

I was accompanied by a typical Hibernian boatman, named Ned Fitzgerald. The river had run very low, and it was the last day of my visit. My host had told me that there was one run, and one only, where a remote chance of "pulling" a salmon existed; so thither I went, accompanied by the aforesaid Ned. Almost at the end of the stretch my "lemon and grey" was seized by a good fish. Just below was a sunken lane leading down to a shelving beach. In order to facilitate fishing this bit of water, a ladder, some eight feet in length, had been so placed that the angler, having a fish in hand, could shin down, cross the lane, and crawl over the opposite bank, when again the quarry haply *might be* under command. But such an acrobatic demonstration did not appeal to me in the least. Despite my attendant's excited exhortations, I preferred to stay where I was, and attempt to head the fish up-stream. I did my little best, but it gradually bored down, until the wall of the bank blinked my view of it, and I could only *guess* its whereabouts!

This was playing blind-man's buff with a vengeance; but I *felt* that my victim was weakening, so I bade Ned get down into the lane and I would attempt to manœuvre the fish to the shallow at the end thereof. At the same time, I told him to keep me well informed as to the exact position of the fish, and what it was doing. When I judged that it was within a fair distance of the strand, I called to the son of Erin to wade in with the gaff; but he seemed an unconscionable time in so doing.

"What are you waiting for?" I cried.

"Aw' bad cess to ut!" he shouted back, "ut's me infernal boot-laces phwat's in a knot!"

"Damn your boot-laces!" I screamed. "I've got the fish ready; get in, boots and all!"

"An' is ut meself phwat wud be going inter the wather wid me best Sunday boots on, and thim the ony wans phwat I possess, an' ut's tin good shillin' Oi paid foor 'em on St. Pathrick's day! The Holy Saints forgive me!"

It was no good arguing the matter, so I held on to the captive, which luckily seemed now to be dead-beat.

At last I heard Ned splash into the water; but a few seconds later he called out, as it seemed, to the salmon:

"Come back, yez dirthy divil, come back! *Faith, yez got me gaff!*"

What think you had happened?

Why, the silly galoot had struck the fish all right, but it had pulled the gaff out of his hand, and had darted away like lightning; but happily without freeing itself.

My line ran out again at express speed, and then the gaff handle—looking like the periscope of a submarine—came into view careering up-stream. I held on manfully, and after a time managed to bring the gaff, with the fish attached, within the reach of Ned's hand; so that he was able to grasp the staff and hoike the fish—a fine nineteen-pounder—on to firm, dry land.

This little story when retailed to the other fishermen and the members of the house-party, caused unlimited hilarity, and it was many a day before the unfortunate Edward was allowed to forget his weird performance. Every morning when he went out one of his colleagues was sure to say: "Aw' Ned, had yez not betther take a spare gaff wid yez, in case so be yez lose wan in the back av a fish?"

To return to Ballinahinch.

By the time the 12th of October had arrived and rods and tackle were regretfully laid aside, my personal tally amounted to ninety-four salmon and five hundred and seven sea-trout; whilst many others had fallen to Teddy Maurice and the late Oswald Part, who, with his sportive wife, had been with us in the earlier days of my tenancy. About this time we were visited by the Hon. Aubrey Hastings, of "Ascetic Silver" fame; but this was before that gallant steed and his accomplished rider had pulled off "The Grand National."

Fishing being at an end, our thoughts turned to villainous saltpetre, and guns took the place of rods; but it was some time before we had anything of importance to shoot at. There was a certain number of snipe scattered among the rushes that fringed the river, but they were few and far between; so that there was nothing doing until the "cock" began to come in. Even these succulent fowl were not exactly in profusion, though we managed to bag a respectable number.

Participating in this sport were two cheery gunmen, Commander Wilson, son of the sea, and his brother, Captain Leslie, of the same ilk—a soldier bold. Moreover, my two lads, who had looked upon fishing as an altogether contemptible activity, waxed quite enthusiastic now that shooting was toward. In fact, so eager was the younger of the two, Lionel, that in his anxiety to encompass the death of the elusive *Scollopida*, that he blazed at every one which came within a hundred yards of his ken. Nor did he hesitate to let off even when the bird was flying so low that the beaters—to say nothing of his precious friends and relatives—were in imminent danger of being peppered.

It was only a matter of time before the inevitable happened, for, having let loose at a woodcock which flew directly to the rear of the beaters, we were greeted with loud lamentations from one of them. This proved to be none other than Micky Magee, who yelled out: " Aw' bad cess to ut, ut's murthered and kilt Oi am intoirely! Faith, and the yong gintleman has shot me dead!"

We rushed up and found the unfortunate one rubbing his head's antipodes, the while emitting most blood-curdling groans, intermingled with strange oaths in his native Erse.

Naturally enough, my young hopeful was in a terrible state of perturbation. No doubt he had visions of a trial for manslaughter or worse, with chains and dungeons to follow. Nor was he restored to equanimity until he was assured that a careful diagnosis had revealed the fact that only two shots had pierced Magee's epidermis, and to such shallow effect that we were able to prise them out with a penknife. Nevertheless, the whimpering boy had dived into his pocket and, producing a carefully hoarded half-sovereign, had handed it over to the victim of his carelessness, who, as soon as he had received the *douceur*, ceased his groaning and curses. Grinning from ear to ear, he seized the little Lionel's hand, exclaiming:

" Aw' more power to yez 'anner! May the blessed saints presarve yez, and if so be ye'd be having another shot at pour ould Micky, begob yez welcome!"

In addition to those I have already mentioned as guests of the Castle, was my trusty friend, Bizzy Robinson (he of the glass-eye) and his charming wife Kate.

After our day's sport we had many merry evenings. All sorts of spoof, games and entertainments—in the invention of which Teddy Maurice was the moving spirit—were engineered. The ladies of the party subscribed to a prize to be presented to the male guest who should produce the best dinner-table decoration; and many an artistic production was evolved. Another time we decided to have a fancy-dress repast, and each racked his or her brains in the invention of some weird costume or characterization. Here again Teddy's theatrical experience served us in good stead. Though his make-up of various members of the party was strikingly effective, in some cases they were decidedly inconvenient! For instance, he made up Bizzy as Captain Pott, using *black nose paste* in order to fashion the fierce moustache and imperial of Mr. Cutcliffe Hyne's irrepressible hero, and to such purpose that the said Bizzy was quite unable to work his jaws for the purpose of mastication.

Some of us felt convinced that this was contrived by our histrionic friend in *malice prepense;* consequently we egged on the victim to seek vengeance. When it came to a similar show a week later, he persuaded his persecutor to present himself at table *encased in a portable Turkish bath,* with a rough towel wrapped round his head, which was the only part of his anatomy which protruded from the unwieldy contraption.

As soon as he was placed in position, Bizzy slipped a padlock through the fastening of the lid and turned the key. All being ready, we sat down and commenced to feed, paying no attention whatever to the unfortunate captive, who had perforce to look on whilst we devoured the delicacies which were put before us. His piteous pleas for release went for a long time unheeded; but at last, so heart-rending were his appeals that kind-hearted Kate Robinson held a glass of champagne to his lips, and finally he was freed from his incarceration, just in time to enjoy a *vanilla ice,* which was the last item on the menu!

In the Bay of Cashel there was said to be very good fishing for black bream, haddock, mackerel and other denizens of the deep. Belonging to the Castle was a ten-ton fishing smack, which had been placed at our service; but the salmon and sea-trout were keeping us so busy during the season that we had not much time to exploit the ancient craft; though, on one occasion, I tried some desultory sea-fishing without any obvious result. So we proceeded to scoop up oysters from the celebrated Cashel beds, which belonged to my friend, the over-lord of the Castle. These bivalves were of excellent quality, so we made free with them to our hearts' content.

About two miles away, in the offing of the bay, was a rock-bound island, in which roamed a herd of about sixty fallow deer; but it was only when the wind was in a favourable direction that there was any chance of landing thereon.

On several occasions we sailed out, armed with our rifles, to reconnoitre; but each time we were told by Larry and Micky that an attempt to land would probably end in disaster; so we had perforce to abandon the idea; although in addition to the aforesaid deer, this island (the name of which I fail to remember) was a favourite haunt of woodcock.

If ever I find myself again in this beauty spot—Beloved Connemara—I mean to have one of those fallow buck, and to take toll of the longbills, given a chance to set my foot on the forbidding shores of that wind and sea swept island.

CHAPTER XXVI

MY last visit to the land of Vikings, salmon, fieldfares and "clegs," was, as far as the second named is concerned, a complete and unholy wash-out; but it had its compensations and humours, some of which may be deemed worthy of inclusion in these rambling reminiscences.

I can imagine some readers who are without intimate experience of Scandinavian fauna asking themselves: "What are "clegs"?

I will tell you.

A cleg is a sort of super-gadfly: a fearsome fowl about as big as a Queen wasp, with great, goggling, green eyes and a gargantuan appetite for human flesh. One has to be continually on the *qui vive* when a cleg is about, otherwise, after buzzing around in an apparently innocent manner, this horrific creature will seize the opportunity—when one is busy with the rod—to suddenly drop on one's neck, bite out a chunk of flesh, fly away, perch on an overhanging bough and gorge itself to repletion on the reeking rations—and this in front of one's very eyes!

When in search of a likely Norwegian salmon river, it was my custom to pay a visit to Messrs. J. A. Lumley's, where I knew that good Mr. McDowell would provide me with the best goods at the moment on the market.

I had been on the Sand (twice), the Surendal and the Namsen, and now was anxious to extend my experiences.

"Look here," said the agent, "will you do a little pioneer work? I cannot promise you a stone-cold certainty of success. On the other hand, there is a *good sporting chance* of your having the time of your life!

"It is this way. We have bought up all the nets and traps for three miles on the middle reaches of the Rauma river, which runs into the fjord at Romsdal.

" For years, an average of over five hundred good fish has been taken by these same nets and traps. Now it is reasonable to suppose that—such being entirely removed—the pools and runs where they played such havoc will, this season, hold a fine show of fish.

" If you would care to take your chance you can do so, and we shall not charge you a penny rental ; but should you enjoy such sport as we have reason to anticipate, we hope you will give us a report which will ensure satisfactory lettings in the future."

Always ready to take advantage of likely " sporting chances " such as the worthy Mr. McDowell was now offering, I jumped in and clinched the bargain.

The Rauma is an exceedingly picturesque river of considerable dimensions, and is dominated by the conical Romsdalhorn, a peak which is strongly reminiscent of the far-famed Matterhorn. Salmon are able to run up some ten miles, until the big foss at Ormheim (I think that is its name) puts an end to their further progression.

I will pass over our voyage across the dour North Sea and the delightful trip from Mölde to the mouth of the Rauma, replete as it was with interest, but devoid of any conspicuous incident.

Behold, then, our party established in a small farmhouse in the Flatmarc district. To say that our quarters were even comfortable, not to say luxurious, would be to stretch imagination to its utmost limits. Frankly speaking, they were squalid and none too clean.

And of whom did the said party consist ? As the cricketing egoist said when asked the strength of the eleven of which he was discoursing : " *First of all* there was *me !* "

Then, of course, there was the C.O., who had been " blooded " (or should I not say " slimed " ?) with her first salmon the previous season on the Sand, as already narrated.

Her sister-in-law Hattie had come along to lend a hand at the domestic amenities ; whilst my young friend Lindsay Garrard (a dragoon officer and brother of Harry of the same ilk, who had been my subaltern in the Duke of Cambridge's Hussars) had joined up. Lastly there was one Dickie Rorvig, whose family tree showed that his father was a Swede and his mother an Irishwoman. This was a quaint bird, bubbling over with humour; a first-rate batsman, a tricky bowler and a good horseman—he was up to any sport or game that might be thrown in his way. But so far his fishing achievements had been negligible; in fact he knew nothing whatever about the fascinating art of the angle. Though ever in a chronic state of impecuniosity, so cheery was he and so keen on sport, that he was always welcome in our circle.

He was of what the police reports describe as "medium height and build," with a knowledgeable, square head, a somewhat rubicund countenance, an inconspicuous snub-nose and an expansive mouth.

With scant ceremony, my C.O. had dubbed him "Bonehead," by which descriptive pseudonym he was universally recognized and addressed.

As soon as ever we had descended from our respective carioles, Lindsay and I went on to the wide wooden bridge which spanned the river in front of our quarters. It was at once evident that the river was in flood, and that we should have to possess our souls in patience until it had subsided at least two feet, which might not come about for some days, and if luck and weather proved against us—for weeks on end!

This was a bright look-out!

Anyway, it gave us time to look around, spy out the land and investigate the fluvial intricacies of the Rauma. After walking from one end of the beat to the other, I must say I was not very favourably impressed; although the high state of the water forbade my forming anything like an accurate, or even fair, estimate of its possibilities and probabilities. At some points the river was very wide, and judging from the flow, none too deep. At others, it rushed and tumbled through narrow, rocky gorges, where I was quite unable to visualize anything like a promising pool or run. In fact, on the whole stretch, the absence of what was likely to prove a good cast, if and when the flood might subside, was only too apparent to any practised eye.

Here and there, the flood had invaded the surrounding land, forming a series of large lagoons. Whilst skirting one of these, I observed distinct rises of fish of some kind, far and wide. I had my eight-foot fly rod with me, but had left my waders at home. However, the ever-obliging " Bonehead " volunteered to fetch them; being, as he said, dead keen on seeing me perform.

During his half-hour's absence, I sat me down under an adjacent pine and lit my pipe. The rises were still dimpling the surface merrily; but I was unable to decide what manner of fish were responsible for them.

As soon as my volatile friend returned, I donned the waders, set up a cast with a medium " March brown " and a small " butcher " and commenced operations. Surely this was a queer game, casting for fish among small larches and hazel-bushes. The " going " was pretty level—from two to three feet in depth, but there were pitfalls which had to be carefully avoided.

I approached within casting distance of a fish that was rising persistently. It came for my " stretcher " at once, but I felt nothing. As this unproductive disturbance was repeated half a dozen times, I was able to make a shrewd guess at the identity of the fish.

A few more casts and I had him all right. Yes, as I expected, *a grayling* of three-quarters of a pound. After fishing for an hour or so I had a score of the " ladies," all about the same size. They were in fair condition, but not what they would be in four months' time.

Subsequently I discovered that the small tributaries of the Rauma teemed with *salmo thymallus*, and that when the land became flooded they spread themselves far and wide; but I never caught a grayling in the Rauma itself, which seems odd.

There was, too, a fair showing of trout in these small streams, but none of great size: the biggest I accounted for only just exceeded the pound. As matters turned out, I had, *faute de mieux*, to fall back on these small deer to satisfy my piscatorial cravings and to garnish our meagre board. But I anticipate.

Shortly after our arrival I had a hunch to procure a bunch of hoodie crow nestlings; since having—this time—no bloodthirsty Billy to dismember them, as was the case at Harang, I hoped to rear some of these handsome, but mischievous rascals, and to import them to my native land as pets.

But our surroundings were of the wild, woolly and mountainous order, and as the holdings were small, the "hoodies" could not get a decent living, since the farmers were able to fire them out whenever a raid on their stock was attempted.

So my offered reward went begging. But one day a little lad brought me five young *magpies*. These being of just the right age for rearing, I took charge of them, after parting with a couple of kroners to their captor, which *douceur* was gratefully and joyously accepted.

These fledglings soon waxed strong and hearty. We named them respectively Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and Acts. It was rather difficult at first to tell t'other from which, but I soon learned to distinguish them by some characteristic not obvious to the uninitiated.

As a matter of fact, all Nature's children possess individuality, and in some cases distinct "personality." Many people are quite unable to understand how a shepherd can distinguish between his sheep, or how it is that a master of hounds knows every unit of his pack, not only by sight, but by tongue.

These impertinent "pies" were extraordinarily tame, though hopelessly mischievous. They were allowed to fly about the homestead as their fancy might tickle them. If they saw me coming they would flit to me and perch upon my shoulders, and always in the same positions: Matthew and Acts on my right, Luke and John on my left, whilst Mark, who considered himself boss of the bunch, would occupy a conspicuous post on my head. Then all would begin to squeak vociferously for food, which I would hand up to each in turn. Their appetite was insatiable.

They were merry and amusing folk, and they thrived apace.

A harmful and unnecessary tom-cat set sinister eyes upon them, and one day launched an offensive against Matthew, the smallest and weakest of the family; but grimalkin little reckoned what he was up against, though he soon realized the mistake he had made. The whole pie contingent set about him so vigorously that he was obliged to beat a hasty retreat, utterly disgruntled and lucky to escape with his eyesight slightly impaired and an ensanguined nose.

There was only one casualty in the family during our stay. There came a day when the dead body of the weakling Matthew was found in the open well which occupied the centre of the farmyard. How it came to be there, and what had brought about the poor bird's untimely end, remains one of those unsolved and mysterious tragedies which have intrigued writers of detective romances from days immemorial.

As time went on, the survivors went further afield, and though they generally reassembled at feeding time, they became more and more independent. Then they began staying out of nights, and sometimes days would pass without the whole family putting in an appearance. One by one, the call of the wild claimed them, and anon we knew them no more.

Truly, gratitude is the rarest of virtues (its antithesis, a prevailing vice), even among the creatures of fur and feather; always excepting the canine, but including the feline species. "Acts" was the last to desert us. In fact I believe that, at the last moment, he repented him of his want of loyalty; for as our carioles rumbled away to the mouth of the Rauma on our homeward journey, the staccato cry of a magpie was continually heard, whilst an occasional glimpse of a decorative black and white body was seen flitting from tree to tree above us and keeping pace with our progression.

"Here, I say, old Cockie!" my friends who read these chronicles will exclaim, "how about this miraculous draught of salmon that you were to tell us about?"

"Ah!" I make reply, "that's where the laugh comes in! I sat by the waters of the Rauma and wept, for six weary weeks, and *devil a salmon did I see*, much less gather to myself!"

One wretched grilse of three and a half pounds, which had wandered from the main river into one of the lagoons and which, like Mr. John Jones of Covent Garden, not knowing "where he were," had in a moment of aberration seized the fly which I was plying for his cousin *thymallus*.

When the river had subsided, after we had been in residence a fortnight, I found, alas! that my early estimate of possibilities was only too accurate. There was not a really inviting pool or resting-place throughout the whole stretch! That plenty of salmon had come up was obvious; for, ten miles above, at the Ormheim foss, they were pulling them out by the dozen! Evidently the fish had run right through my water without lingering anywhere.

When I delivered my report to good Mr. McDowell, he was bitterly disappointed—*so, incidentally, was I!*

But I did not complain. I had jumped at what he had frankly told me was a fair sporting chance, and it had come unstuck! That's all there is to it!

But, all said and done, we had some measure of fun for our pocket-money, one way or another. I caught a few sea-trout in the river (with one exception, of no great size), whilst, as stated, I was always able to fill my basket with grayling and "brownies" in the lagoons and smaller streams. The capture of "the exception" quoted, is worth recording.

Close home, and just above the bridge, was a hole which usually held a herling or two. I had just hitched on to one such, and was persuading it to come to net, when there was a great upheaval, and it was violently seized by something of considerable dimensions, which held on and kept shaking the doubly unfortunate *trutta* as Billy was used to do with a rat.

Moreover, this vicious customer refused to let go until I attempted to slip my net under the twain; then he dropped his prey, went quickly about and retired to his dug-out.

This "got my goat," so I determined on the destruction of this hooligan.

Giving him an hour to settle down in the hole to think things over, I directed Johann Flatmarc, my boatman, to take me in the scow, so that I could harl a "devon" within reach of the would-be cannibal.

Sure enough, that same volatile fish made no bones about attacking the glittering lure. This time, there was no escaping the meshes, though ere he lay gasping on firm, dry land, he gave me a merry bit of sport. He proved to be of that variety of the *salmo* family known as a "bull-trout." I say "*variety,*" because the consensus of opinion among icthyologists is that this fish does *not* represent a distinct species. His weight was three and a half pounds, and so he dead-heated with the unfortunate grilse, before mentioned, as "the catch of the season!"

One day, Flatmarc—a most picturesque and knowledgeable Norseman, who had been many years in the United States and so spoke "pure Amurrican"—told me of a mysterious inland tarn, where, so he said, leviathan trout lurked. It was altogether out of the beaten track. In fact, he doubted if the foot of man had been set upon its shores for *at least a quarter of a century;* but he remembered, as a small boy, accompanying an uncle, a great native shikari, to this weird spot, where the said avuncular relative had succeeded in pulling out (by what means Johann failed to recall) a sackful of enormous fish! This sounded interesting to mine ears, so I called a gathering of the clan, and suggested a cutting-out expedition.

The "big idea" was received with acclamation, so one fine day found us on the war-path.

After traversing the main road for some five miles in the direction of Ormheim, we took to the forest, and by a devious footpath, and after a forced march, struck the river again. Here it ran narrow and turbulent between gigantic boulders and rocky banks.

"We cross now, Boss," said Johann.

"Cross!" I exclaimed. "How, pray?"

"I sure have small boat. I fetch it right along."

And such a boat! A sort of wobbly dugout that would figure as unsafe on a duck-pond!

We looked at one another, and by mutual telepathy voiced in chorus the monosyllable *No!*

All except one! My beloved "C.O."

"Come on, Cockie dear," she exclaimed. "Who's afraid? I'm not! I'll give you a lead," and she made to enter the unstable craft. I could not permit this, so seized and held her!

"All right, Boss, it's sure quite safe," laughed Johann. "See, I fix it all right, watch out!"

We did! His was an object-lesson in expert watermanship. Two hefty strokes up-stream, a quick drift down—for a dozen feet—a spasmodic twist with one scull around a sinister boulder, and two more powerful strokes up-stream again, and then the frail craft grounded safely between two rocks on the far side.

It struck me very forcibly that unless this aquatic manœuvre was executed with meticulous precision the result would be disastrous in the extreme. An upset in that raging torrent would not afford a dog's chance of survival to the luckless passenger.

But it had to be risked.

I think we offered fervent, if silent, prayers of thanksgiving when we were all safely assembled on the far side.

From this position we had a fine view of the towering mountains which stood guardian over the Rauma Valley. I was greatly interested when Johann pointed out a line of moving specks on the far horizon. He handed me his telescope, and I was able to make out a herd of some hundreds of *wild reindeer* as they threaded their way along the skyline. Now we began to push through what appeared to be a virgin forest. The standing trees were festooned with lichens and other parasitic growths, whilst all around lay those that had yielded to the belated call of Father Time, and had subsided to Mother Earth, where they lay partly concealed by ancient moss and rotting leaves—their skeleton branches grotesquely interwoven.

After an hour's trudge we mounted some sharply-rising ground, on reaching the summit of which a most impressive sight met our eyes. There, shimmering and glinting some five hundred feet below us, was *the lake of mystery!*—nearly oval in shape, fringed with high rushes, and hemmed in by huge boulders of a bright ochre shade. The water, of a vivid emerald tint, was so clear that the light-coloured bottom could be seen everywhere, except in one corner, where the depth was such that the verdant tint of the water shaded into a deep azure. A truly beautiful effect. And there, basking on the surface, were the *great shadowy forms of fish of some sort!*

It was impossible to identify them, but they must be trout, we thought. What else could they be?

We descended hurriedly, set up our rods and donned our waders.

The shallows were only about two and a half feet deep, and good going, on a bottom which shelved very gradually toward the deeper end of the pool.

Plenty of small trout were to be seen darting hither and thither as I waded; but they were not in the least scared, and took the fly freely. They were pretty little fellows, going about seven to the pound, but my soul was hankering after far more weighty loot! Presently I saw quite a big fellow—a three pounder at least—following my tail-fly, but making no attempt to seize it. So interested was he in the strange contraption, that he chased it, nose on, right up to the limit of my draw, and when I was obliged to lift, he rushed forward, and actually barged into my legs! This put the wind up him, and he darted off into the depths.

I was wading carelessly on, each step bringing me towards the deeper water, when I became aware that Bedford, who was perched on a rocky eminence high above me, was shouting and gesticulating wildly. I could not make out what it was he was trying to convey, but my progress was arrested.

My valet came shinning down the rocks like a mountain goat, and soon stood panting on the edge of the water.

"Stand still, sir, for God's sake!" he shouted.

"Why, what's the matter?" I asked wonderingly.

"There's a great hole not three yards in front of you, sir, with water bubbling up. Go back, sir—go back!"

I did as desired, and being anxious to set eyes on the danger that had threatened, I climbed up with Bedford to his original position.

"Look there, sir!" he said. "Now do you wonder I was near scared to death?"

I did *not* wonder!

For there, set in the midst of the pallid and innocent-looking bottom, was a round hole, some six feet in diameter, from which rose a spring of emerald water.

Heaven only knows what the depth of that deadly trap was. Had I inadvertently stepped into it assuredly these lines would never have been written!

"God be praised, I was there to warn you, sir," was Bedford's simple remark.

Meanwhile, Bonehead had skirted round to the deep end, where we had seen the great fish basking. By a very long cast, he hoped to cover the nearest; though now, being on a level with the surface, he could no longer fix their exact locality. For some time his efforts proved fruitless, but all of a sudden we saw his rod bend almost double and heard his reel screech; we scrambled round to him as fast as we could contrive, only to find, on our arrival, a disconsolate guy, with vertical rod and broken cast.

"He straightened me out and smashed me to atoms," he sighed. "Goodness knows what sort of fish he was, or how big, but, my Lord, he *did* give me a feel, Cockie."

While all this was going on, the female contingent, with "Johann" on escort duty, had remained in the bosky recesses of the hill. We now joined them, unpacked our rations and enjoyed a welcome alfresco repast, amid the most weird surroundings it has ever been my luck to strike.

Whilst smoking the pipe of peace and contentment on a bed of the softest and dryest moss, I gazed around in wonderment at the awesome solitude of the scene, which forcibly reminded me of the stage set wherein Rip van Winkle took his twenty-years' nap on the Katskill Mountains.

After rest and refreshment, I essayed to emulate my young friend's adventure at the deep end of the haunted pool, but though I tried many seductive flies, and spun spoon and minnow, not a touch rewarded my efforts.

Our homeward journey was effected without any striking incident, though once more we had to endure the thrills and tremors of the perilous passage of the Rauma.

That evening when Johann came in for orders, I asked him how the mystic pool was called.

"It sure has no name, as far as I am wise, Boss," he said.

"Let us christen it 'Lake Cockie!'" suggested my C.O.

Carried unanimously!

THE END

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